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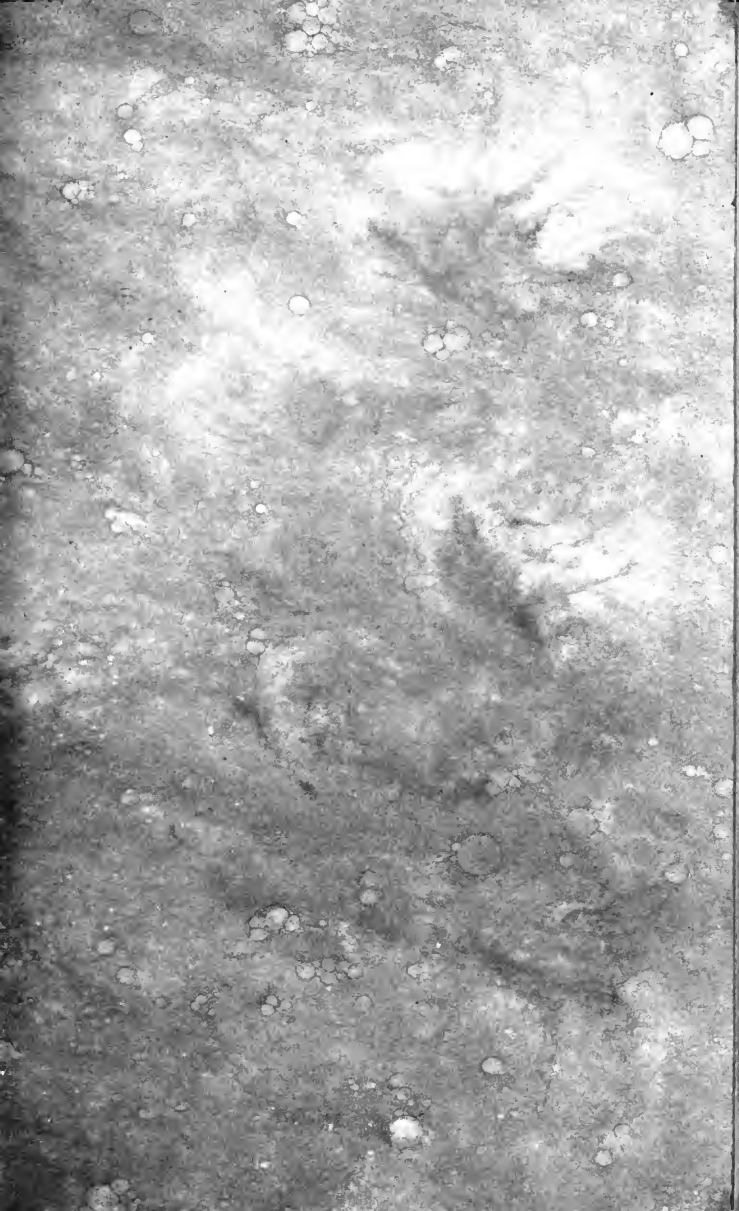
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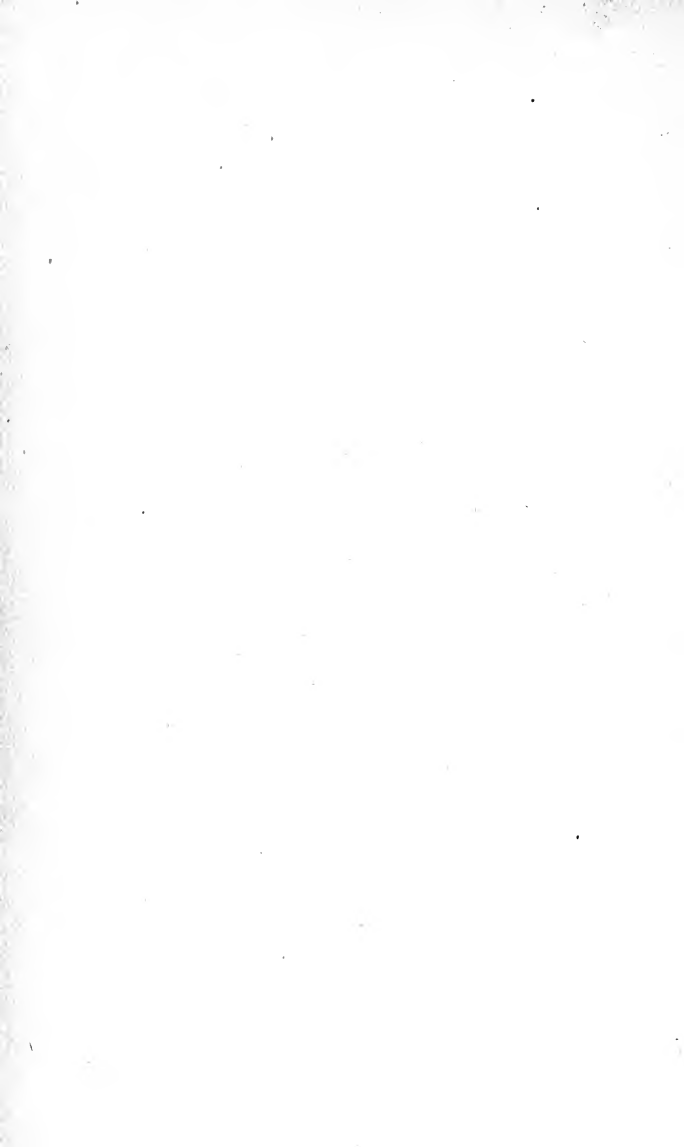
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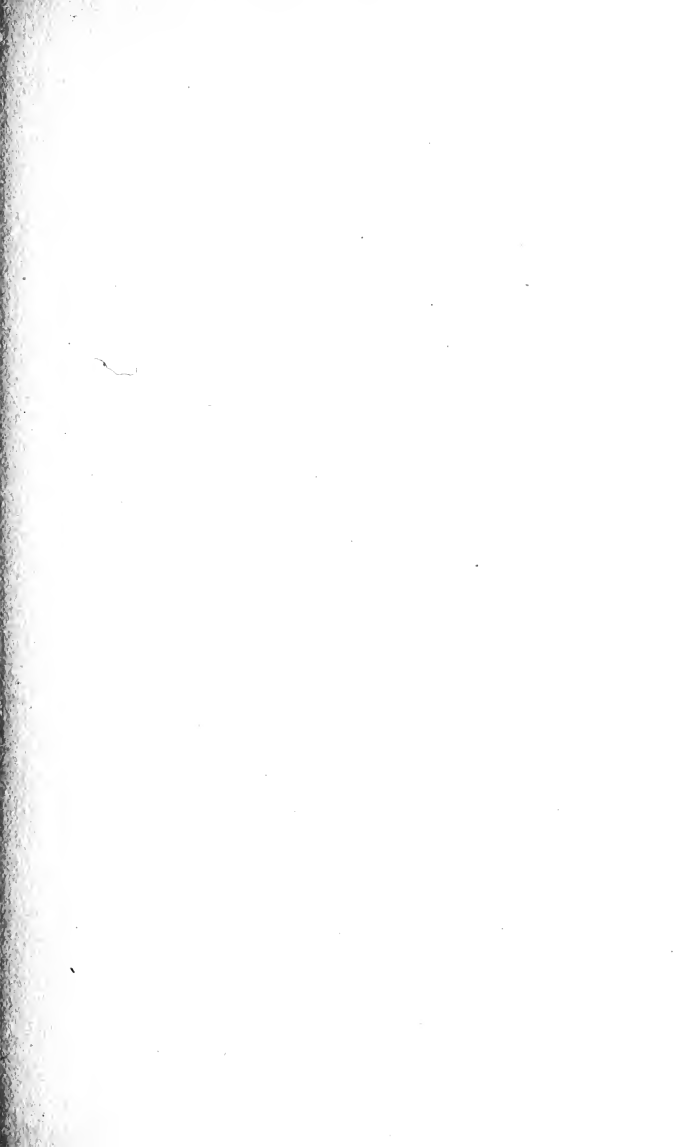
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THE POEMS

OF

Geoffrey Chaucer,

MODERNIZED.

That noble Chaucer, in those former times,
Who first enriched our English with his rhymes,
And was the first of ours that ever broke
Into the Muse's treasures, and first spoke
In mighty numbers; delving in the mine
Of perfect knowledge.

WORDSWORTH.

LONDON:

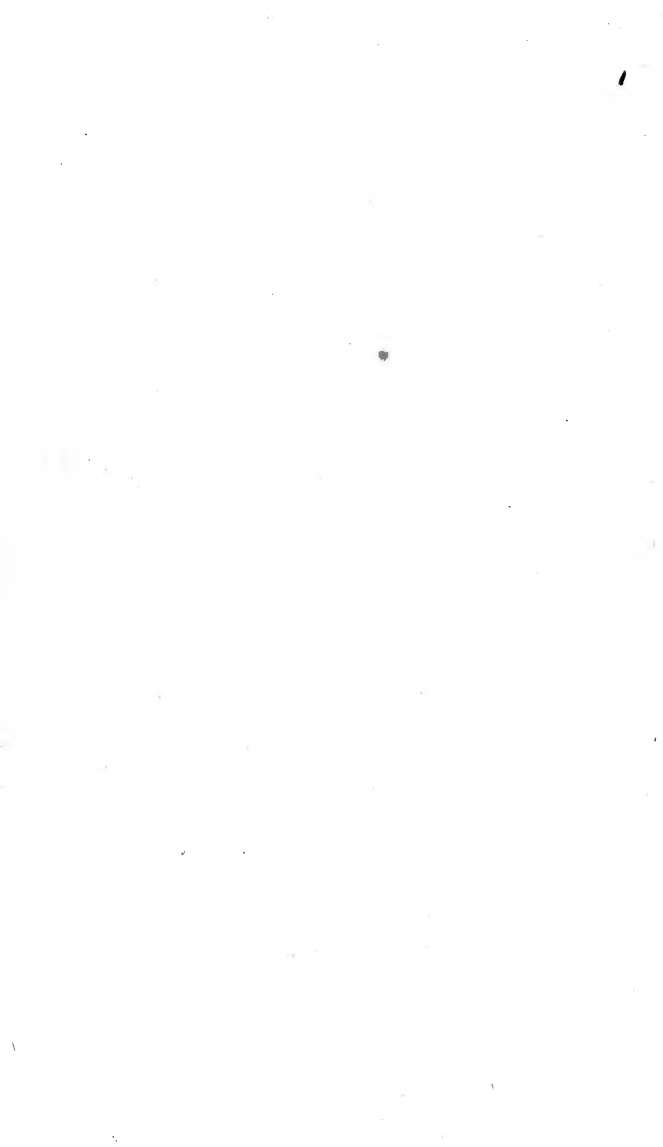
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INTRODUCTION.

For out of the olde fieldés, as men sayth,
Cometh all this new corn from year to year ;
And out of oldé bookés, in good faith
Cometh all this new science that men lere.

CHAUCER.

THE present publication does not result from an antiquarian feeling about Chaucer, as the Father of English Poetry, highly interesting as he must always be in that character alone ; but from the extraordinary fact, to which there is no parallel in the history of the literature of nations,—that although he is one of the great poets for all time, his works are comparatively unknown to the world. Even in his own country, only a very small class of his countrymen ever read his poems. Had Chaucer's poems been written in Greek or Hebrew, they would have been a thousand times better known.

They would have been translated. Hitherto they have had almost everything done for them that a nation could desire, in so far as the most careful collation of texts, the most elaborate essays, the most ample and erudite notes and glossaries, the most elaborate and classical (as well as the most trite and vulgar) paraphrases, the most eloquent and sincere admiration and comments of genuine poets, fine prose writers, and scholars—everything, in short, has been done, except to make them intelligible to the general reader.

Except in the adoption of a modern typography, Chaucer's poems have always appeared hitherto, under no better auspices for modern appreciation than on their first day of publication, some three centuries and a half ago. Concerning the various attempts to render several of his poems available to the public, which have been made at intervals by poets and lovers of Chaucer, a few remarks will shortly be submitted. With whatever reverence or admiration these latter may have been received by the readers of those poets who intro-

duced such specimens among their own works, it is certain that they produced no perceptible effect in the popularity of the original author.

Whether there has been a feeling in the public about Chaucer, amounting to a sort of unconscious resentment at the total inability to read his poems without first bestowing the same pains upon his glossary, which has been more willingly accorded to poetry and prose in the Scottish dialect ; or whether on account of certain passages which in the present stage of refinement appear offensive to a degree that the good folks of Chaucer's time, as well as the poet himself, could never have contemplated, it is not necessary to determine. Such an antipathy to the study of his language does exist ; and—while we, curiously enough, find Chaucer sometimes apologizing, with meek humility and *gentillesse*, for using some expressions which are *now* in common use, but which were considered very improper in his day—it is undeniable that various passages and expressions occur here and there, in his

works, which are calculated to startle a modern reader, and make him doubt his eyes. Howbeit, this great fact is sufficiently apparent,—that Chaucer is a poet, and a founder of the language of his country; (taking rank, as such, with Homer and with Dante, and being the worthy forefather of Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton;) whose poetry is comparatively unread and unknown even in his own country. The simple statement of such a fact will sufficiently explain the feeling which, in all sincerity and reverent admiration, has prompted those who have united in the present undertaking.

From what has been said, it will be readily apprehended, that this attempt at a translation, or transfusion of Chaucer into modern English, is by no means intended for the reading of those, who, being learned in the black letter, or familiar with the dialect of the period, can and do read the great poet with facility and delight. It is expressly intended for all that vast majority of our countrymen, and of foreigners acquainted with the English and English literature,

who are unable to do this; and who, either from indisposition, or the want of sufficient leisure, have never given the study requisite for a right appreciation of the author's meaning, but who, at the same time, having a genuine love for noble poetry, would rejoice to find such labours superseded by a faithful version of the great poet, bereft of his obsolete dialect. The project has already received demonstration of the utmost sympathy from many high quarters at home and abroad, while the work was going through the press; and we have at present only met with one individual of literary eminence who boldly declared, that he still wished "to keep Chaucer for himself and a few friends."

The grand obstacle to be surmounted in reading Chaucer has, of course, been always, that of his obsolete dialect; but one of the main causes of his poems remaining so long without modernizing, (for they have hitherto been only paraphrased in a very free manner) is because they are all in rhyme. Here begins the first and most trying difficulty in rendering his poems avail-

able to the public of the present time. To translate his poems into blank verse, would be losing a characteristic feature of the original; to give the rhymes he uses is often impossible, because the words themselves, or the grammatical structure of the terminations, are obsolete; to substitute rhymes of similar quantity and sound can seldom be successfully accomplished, because it has a tendency, while you are struggling to obtain the sense of the passage, to induce a mechanical awkwardness; and to supply new rhymes generally requires that a whole line, if not the couplet, must be changed in rhythm, or totally remodelled. In the attempts, therefore, which have been hitherto made (with the exception of two of the Tales, modernized by Lord Thurlow and Mr. Wordsworth) the whole substantial materiel of Chaucer has been left as it stood, and the leading ideas only being adopted, a new poem has been written with more or less ability and verisimilitude, according to the genius and talent of the individual and the principle on which he proceeded.

The versions of Chaucer which have been given by

Dryden and Pope, are elaborate and highly-finished productions, reading exactly like their own poems, and not bearing the slightest resemblance to Chaucer. Even his finest lines and couplets, which often require little or nothing more than a change in the orthography, have scarcely ever been retained. Everything was paraphrased, made fluent, sounding, and full of 'effects;' though it is equally true, that Chaucer occasionally received a very noble present from Dryden, for which nothing more than a suggestion is traceable in the original*. Their versions of several of the Canterbury Tales, bearing the dates of 1699 and 1711, were subsequently adopted by Ogle, together with some of his own, and of sundry other writers, and published in three volumes in 1741. The same versions, with

* "Did the interest to be derived from Chaucer's works arise solely from their poetical merits, and did not their *historical interest, as descriptive of contemporary manners and opinions*, enter at all into the question, the criticisms of Dryden upon his remodifications of Chaucer might be regarded as just. But, as it is, the improvements and additions of Dryden are in fact blemishes fully as great as his omissions."—HIPPISEY'S *Early English Literature*, Cap. II.

additions, were collected by Lipscombe, and published in 1795. As it is impossible to praise these editions for any resemblance to the original, it would be far more agreeable to pass them without further remark; but our readers will naturally expect some proofs in support of the judgment thus hazarded. It is earnestly requested, however, that the following brief review may not be understood as given for the sake of criticism, but solely out of reverence towards Chaucer, who has not been fairly treated.

With every respect, then, for the genius, and for everything that belongs to the memory of Dryden, the grand charge to which his translations from Chaucer are amenable is that he has acted upon an erroneous principle. While it is manifest that much of Chaucer needs but little more than modern orthography and an occasional transposition of words, in order to retain such portions as entire and as intelligible as the productions of the most lucid writer of the present time,—Dryden considered that nothing whatever of the original substance

should be retained. He translates Chaucer, without any exceptions, as he would Ovid, Virgil, or Homer, and there seem no characteristic differences. Some idea may be formed of the manner in which Chaucer's foundation is built over, by the fact that the character of the poor Parson in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* contains only fifty-two lines,—while Dryden's version of it occupies one hundred and forty lines. However the execution may be admired, it is quite clear that the grand and sonorous pomp of the style is directly opposite to the extreme simplicity of the original. Chaucer says of his poor Parson, that,—

To drawen folk to heaven with fairéness,
By good ensample, was his business.

Dryden says of his,—

For, letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upward to the sky !

The lofty idea here suggested of a figure standing in the clouds, and letting down “the golden chain”

for his audience, can surely never be received as the companion or representative of the meek and unostentatious man of God who went in all weathers to visit his sick parishioners,—

Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.

In Dryden's version of the 'Knight's Tale' these lines occur:—

Next stood Hypocrisy, with holy fear ;
Soft smiling and demurely looking down,
But hid the dagger underneath the gown :
The assassinating wife, the holy fiend ;
And far the blackest there, the traitor-friend.

The original of all this is one line,—

The smiler with the knife under the cloak.

It is hard to lose such a line for the sake of a trifling matter of spelling. The "obsolete" outcast is merely this,—

The smiler with the knif under the cloke.

There is in Chaucer the strength of a giant combined with the simplicity of a child. The latter is quite

metamorphosed in Dryden's swelling verse. Whenever he attempts simplicity, which is very rarely, he fails. Let the reader compare his account of the death of Arcite with Chaucer's profound pathos. The following is one of his closest imitations of the original:—

Yet could he not his closing eyes withdraw,
Though less and less of Emily he saw ;
So, speechless, for a little space he lay ;
Then grasp'd the hand he held, and sigh'd his soul away.

Dryden.

Duskéd his eyen two, and fail'd his breth,
But on his ladie yet cast he his eye ;
His last-é word was ' Mercy, Emelie !'
His spirit changéd house—

Chaucer.

The fact is, Dryden's version of the 'Knight's Tale' would be most appropriately read by the towering shade of one of Virgil's heroes, walking up and down a battlement and waving a long gleaming spear to the roll and sweep of his sonorous numbers.

Of the highly finished paraphrase, by Mr. Pope, of the 'Wife of Bath's Prologue,' and the 'Merchant's Tale,'

suffice it to say that the licentious humour of the original being divested of its quaintness and obscurity, becomes yet more licentious in proportion to the fine touches of skill with which it is brought into the light. Spontaneous coarseness is made revolting by meretricious artifice. Instead of keeping in the distance that which was objectionable by such shades in the modernizing as should have answered to the hazy appearance of the original, it receives a clear outline, and is brought close to us. An ancient Briton, with his long rough hair and painted body, laughing and singing half naked under a tree, may be coarse, yet innocent of all intention to offend ; but if the imagination, (absorbing the anachronism,) can conceive him shorn of his falling hair, his paint washed off, and in this uncovered state introduced into a drawing-room full of ladies in rouge and diamonds, hoops and hair-powder, no one can doubt the injury thus done to the ancient Briton. This is no unfair illustration of what was done in the time of Pope, and by these

editions of Ogle and Lipscombe. They are *not* modernized versions—which implies modern delicacy, as well as modern language—they are vulgarized versions. The public of the present day would certainly never tolerate any similar proceeding, even were it likely to be attempted.

But if such poets and artists as Dryden and Pope, are open to objections for their unceremonious paraphrases, what shall be said of the presumption of Messrs. Ogle, Lipscombe, and others, in following their example. Perhaps the worst of these specimens are from the pens of Mr. Betterton and Mr. Cobb. Their modern grossness and vulgarity are astonishing. In their execution of the finest passages of pathos or of humour there is, at best, only such a vestige remaining of the original as serves to show the difference of men's minds in contemplating the same objects.

Let the reader, who is not familiar with the portrait and character of *Absolon*, in the 'Miller's Tale,' imagine a jolly parish clerk of these olden times—with a ruddy

complexion, and thick golden locks “strouting” out behind, like a “broad fan”—his dress neat and close, with red stockings, and “St. Paul’s windows carved upon his shoes;” a kirtle thick with points and tags; and a “gay surplice” over all, as “white as is the blossom upon the thorn.” This jolly parish clerk, smitten with the charms of the wife of a carpenter, sends her all sorts of presents, and serenades her continually with voice and instrument. But finding all his efforts to attract her love or admiration ineffectual, he has recourse to a more dignified proceeding. He brings a small scaffolding or stage (probably drawn by a mule) before her window,—mounts it, and enacts the part of *Herod* in one of the Miracle plays! This most ludicrous and matchless climax is vulgarized by Mr. Cobb in these lines; not one word of which belongs to Chaucer any more than the sense of them,—

“Sometimes he *scaramouch’d* it all on hie,
And *harlequin’d* it with activity :
Betrays the lightness of his empty head,
And how he could cut capers * * * .”

But it is not only the loss of this unexampled picture, as a piece of rich graphic humour, that constitutes the ground of complaint, but the loss of the *historical* information involved in the original description. This performance of the part of *Herod* by the jolly parish clerk is a proof of the kind of plays that were acted in the reigns of Edward III. and Richard II., *viz.* Miracle Plays; since called, erroneously, Mysteries and Moralities.

When the Pardoner is describing how he stands up “like a clerk in his pulpit,” to preach the money out of the pockets of his deluded audience, by “an hundred japes” or knaveries, the following most graphic picture is given :—

Then paine I me to stretchen forth my necke,
And east and west *upon the people I beck*
As doth a dove, sitting upon a barn !

Chaucer.

Then forth with painful *toil* my neck I stretch,
And east and west *my arms* extended reach.
So on a barn's long roof you might have seen
A *pouting* pigeon woo his feather'd queen !

Lipscombe.

In the quotation from Chaucer, be it observed, all the words are his own, and only one spelt differently. An old man, (who is Death in disguise) tired of life through decrepitude and loss of his faculties, is thus described :—

And on the ground, which is my mother's gate,
I knock-e with my staff, early and late,
And say to her, ' Leave, mother !—let me in !'

Chaucer.

Here at my mother earth's *deaf sullen* gate,
My staff, *sad sole support*, early and late
Knocks *with incessant stroke*, but knocks in *vain*,
For nought she hears though sadly I complain.

Lipscombe.

And on this principle are heaps of common-place epithets and expletives employed throughout these editions, in order to evade taking the incomparable original, even where it needs but the most trifling assistance. The idea of any one re-writing or paraphrasing such passages ! What would become of the finest things in Spenser and Shakspeare by this process ? And yet Mr. Lipscombe seems to endeavour to keep closer

upon the borders of his author than most of the others, though he takes equal care never to touch upon his domains. Perhaps the best in execution of these paraphrases (of course excepting those of Dryden and Pope), are the tales furnished by Mr. Boyce: at all events, they are the most ambitious. He renders the 'Squire's Tale' in stanzas. The opening, it must be acknowledged, is high and imposing:—

Where peopled Scythia's verdant plains extend
East in that sea, in whose unfathom'd flood
Long-winding Volga's rapid streams descend
On Oxus bank, an ancient city stood ;
Then Sarra—but to later ages known
By rising Samarcand's imperial name,
There, held a potent prince his honour'd throne, &c.

Many readers may perhaps admire the lofty tone of this opening stanza—but why associate it with the name of Chaucer? The whole of the above is thus simply given in the original:—

At Sarra, in the land of Tartarie,
There dwelt a king, &c."

When the wounded falcon, in the same tale, perceives the sympathy with her distress which is felt by the king's daughter Canace, a part of the passage is thus rendered by Mr. Boyce,—

So may the sad reflection be believ'd
Which from experience deeply wounded flows,
That *thy superior virtue* undeceiv'd
May *scorn the semblance faithless manhood shows*—
Their vows, their sighs, and all the flatt'ring arts
By which (*they skill'd*) betray deluded virgin hearts.

Here is the original, without a word altered, even in the spelling ;—

I see well, that ye have on my distresse
Compassion, my faire Canace,
Of veray *womanly benigneitee*
That nature in your principles hath set.

And where the falcon begins to tell her story by saying that she was “ bred,—

And fostered in a rock of marble gray,
So tenderly that nothing ailéd me, &c.”

Mr. Boyce commences it with his sounding geographicals,—

Where rapid Niester rolls his noisy wave
High in a marble cliff that brow'd the flood,
My peaceful birth indulgent nature gave ;
Securely there our nest paternal stood, &c.

The following are specimens from the versions of Mr. Ogle, (the projector and editor, I believe, of the first edition,) and of Mr. Betterton, previously mentioned in no terms of admiration. The latter opens the description of the Prioress, in the Prologue, in a style which bears a striking resemblance to that of Sternhold and Hopkins :—

There was with these a Nun, a Prioress ;
A lady of no ord'nary address, &c.

For reasons which will hereafter appear, the reader is requested to observe the barbarous effect of the contraction, by syncope, of the word “ ordinary”—being evidently done to preserve a mechanical adherence to ten

syllables instead of softly sounding the eleventh. In the portraiture of the Friar, in the Prologue, he interpolates some gratuitous indecencies, and omits the finest original lines, even the one which says the friar's neck was "white as is the fleur de lis." At the close, where Chaucer shows us the quaint begging rogue, playing his harp among a crowd of admiring auditors, and turning up his eyes, with an attempted expressing of religious enthusiasm through which the humorous sense of his knavery forces its way, till his eyes "twinkle in his head, aright, as do the stars upon a frosty night"—the whole of this is lost in the vulgar association of "little pigs' eyes," and "small stars" to match, foisted in by the ingenious Mr. Betterton.

In Mr. Ogle's labours there are few specimens approaching more closely to the original than the following. The grammar is peculiar.

For he, nor benefice had got, nor cure,
No patron, yet so worldly, to insure !
So dextrous yet, of body, or of face,
To circumvent no chaplain, with his Grace :

Nor fulsome Dedication could he write,
Drudge for a dame or pander for a knight.
Much rather had he range, beside his bed,
A score of authors unadorn'd in red,
With Aristotle, champion of the schools,
To mend his ways, by philosophic rules ;
Than basely to a *vic'rage* owe his rise,
By courting folly, or by flatt'ring vice,
Than flourish like a prebend in his stall :
That way, he held, was not to rise, but fall,
Nor would he be the man, for all his rent,
Nam'd you the priest of Bray, or priest of Trent.

Ogle.

None of the common-place venalities particularized in the first six lines are to be found in the original, nor is the bad grammar. Chaucer simply says that the poor scholar had as yet got no benefice, nor had any worldly anxiety to hold an office,—

For him was lever han at his beddes hed,
A twenty book-es clothed in black or red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie,
Than rob-es rich, fiddle, or psaltery.

For all that follows, in the paraphrase, there is no further authority in Chaucer than just shown.

Whenever a difficulty occurred in the original—and it is certain there are many—or a peculiar touch of pathos or humour which they did not understand, these gentlemen either said just what they pleased instead, or omitted the passage. In the ‘Frere’s Tale,’ when the Sompnour meets the Devil in the shape of a forester, and asks him where he lives, the Devil replies *in a soft voice*—“Far in the north countree!” This is totally omitted by Mr. Markland. The Sompnour perseveres in asking the supposed forester so many questions, that the poet compares his incessant prating and fidgetting to a woodpecker who is “ever *enquiring upon* every thing.” The idea thus presented to the imagination of the busy creature passing from branch to branch, with his tapping inquiry, and curious prying bill, is certainly one of those wonderfully happy thoughts seldom found in any other writer, except Shakspeare.

This Sompnour which that was as full of jangles,
As full of venime ben this wariangles,
And ever enquering upon every thing, &c.

But Mr. Markland, being indisposed to take the trouble of studying the passage, passes over it without the most distant allusion. It is proper to mention the names of all these gentlemen who have had the presumption to "throw clean overboard" such a writer as Chaucer, in order to place themselves at the helm of his vessel. The common-place paraphrase of Mr. Grosvenor should not, therefore, be omitted, but that he displays no new features in his method. It only remains to mention one more. Here is a specimen from Mr. Brooke's 'Man of Law's Tale,'—and very like pantomime poetry it is.

Hence, Want ! ungrateful visitant, adieu,
Pale empress, hence, with all thy meagre crew ;
Sour discontent, and mortify'd chagrin ;
Lean hollow care, and self-corroding spleen ;
Distress and woe, sad parents of despair,
With wringing hands, and ever rueful air ;
The tread of *dun*, and *bum*'s alarming hand,
Dire as the touch of Circe's circling wand, &c.

It will readily be apprehended, that for all this modern low wit and trite verbiage there is no fraction

of authority in the original. That the circulation of such trash from "bum's alarming hand," pretending to be versions of the best songs of a poet imprisoned in an obsolete dialect, may have contributed, in some degree, to make the public indifferent to their first great author, is not unlikely. Believing these versions to be "Chaucer refined," what must they have conceived of the original?

But whatever injury to the reputation of Chaucer these productions may, or may not, have occasioned, there can be no doubt of the mischief done by Mr. Pope's obscene specimen, placed at the head of his list of "Imitations of English Poets." It is an imitation of those passages which we should only regard as the rank offal of a great feast in the olden time. The better taste and feeling of Pope should have imitated the noble *poetry* of Chaucer. He avoided this "for sundry weighty reasons." But if this so-called imitation by Pope was "done in his youth," he should have burnt it in his age. Its publication at the present

day among his elegant works, is a disgrace to modern times, and to his high reputation.

The version given by Lord Thurlow of the 'Flower and the Leaf' is such, in its execution and fine appreciation, as might be expected of a true poet. He has, however, interpolated several lines in almost every stanza. His translation of the 'Knight's Tale' is admirable for its fidelity, generally, and for its versification,—not on the model of that uniformity of syllables and position of accents which may be regarded as the school of Pope; but he has quite given up the peculiar harmonies of the rhythm of Chaucer. On the latter subject it will be necessary to offer some remarks in the course of the present inquiry.

Concerning the 'Prioress's Tale,' with which the public have become acquainted in the works of Mr. Wordsworth, it cannot be requisite to make any comments, as the severe poetical fidelity of its execution has long since been recognized by all true lovers of Chaucer. A free version of the 'Squire's Tale' was published by Mr. Leigh Hunt some years since; the

translation, however, of that tale which appears in the present volume is an entirely new production.

It only remains to mention the name of one more gentleman, whose "loving labours" to make the public of this day acquainted with the riches of Chaucer are well known, but have been appreciated by far too small a number of readers. About five years ago Mr. Cowden Clarke produced a volume of selections from Chaucer's poems, in which every objectionable passage was omitted, and the greatest beauties retained. The text was carefully collated; many of the words spelt as now in use; a current glossary and notes were given at the bottom of each page, to save the trouble of continual reference and correcting, and the words were accented, so as to enable the general reader to get some notion of Chaucer's quantity and rhythm. But the public recoiled, as heretofore, from the obsolete dialect. The labours of this amiable author, and the cordial co-operation of his publisher, received no adequate encouragement.

Since therefore it appears manifest that the modern

public will not undertake the task of mastering the dialect of the Father of English Poetry, and that the pleasure derived from the original seems likely to continue the exclusive possession of a small class of readers, the projectors of the present undertaking are anxious to adopt such means as may be in their power of diffusing a portion of this pleasure. They venture to hope that, while their labours may not be unacceptable to the million, this publication may also lead to an increase in the numbers of those who read the noble original.

There may be several methods of rendering Chaucer in modern English. It will be sufficient, however, to mention the two extremes. The advocates of the one argue—that in order to render Chaucer truly, it must be done in the spirit rather than the letter; simply because so much of the letter, or words, of his period differ both in sound and sense from those now in use; and that while everything is retained from the original which can be regarded as an exception, the

large mass of the obsolete remainder must be rewritten, *i. e.* supplied by corresponding words and rhythm to the best of the writer's ability. Hence, the spiritual sense of the author is the ruling principle. The advocates of the opposite method argue, that all the substantial material and various rhythm of Chaucer should be adopted as far as possible; his obsolete phrases, words, terminations, and grammatical construction, translated, modernized, and humoured, to the best of the writer's ability. To retain or preserve the existing substance is the rule; to rewrite and paraphrase is the exception. The first method, were its *highest degree* of success attainable, would present little or none of the original material, yet contain the essence of the whole: the greatest success of the other method would be, that on comparing it with the original there should appear to have been very little done, and yet the version be not unacceptable to a modern reader. The first method has its dangers; the latter its disadvan-

tages. But, inasmuch as there is a large portion of the original which needs but little alteration, (except in the opinion of those who may consider they best render Chaucer by merging his identity in their own,) while at the same time there is so large a portion which requires to be entirely remodelled, it seems plain that the greatest amount of the original will be obtained from between these two extremes; the only distinguishing marks of the different methods being a general predominance of this or that principle. What merits they may individually possess it does not rest with us to determine; but it is only fair to state that no one among the contributors to the present volume has attempted the first method.

The safest method, as the most becoming, is manifestly that of preserving as much of the original substance as can be rendered available, "that which appears quaint*", as well as that which is more modern; in

* Polish away all the quaintness, and you erase a portion of *the historical* from the portraiture. It is very curious, and not a little amusing, that this

short as much of the author—his nature—his own mode of speaking and describing, as possible. By thus preserving his best parts we should keep the model of Nature, his own model, before us, and make modern things bend to her,—not her, as is the custom of our self-love, bend to every thing which happens to be modern. It is possible, that something of a vapour, at least to common eyes, might be thus removed from *his* glorious face; but to venture further, we are afraid, would be to attempt to improve the sun itself, or to go and recolour the grass it looks upon.” (*Round Table*, vol. i.*)

word *quaint* should have been a term of some reproach in Chaucer's time. He occasionally uses it in that sense himself:

“ Colours of rhetorike ben to me *queinte* :
My *spirit* feleth not of swiche matere !”

The Franklin's Prologue.

Chaucer himself is now considered quaint beyond measure. The old dramatists are called quaint. At present, the word is sometimes used with us, in the best sense, to express the struggles of genius with an unformed language; sometimes as the quiet humour of our ancestors; sometimes it means an obsolete form of expression; sometimes it expresses the resentments of a modern ear; sometimes it means nothing—which is rather worse than the thing complained of. All the best writers of the present age will become quaint; and as only the best will live to enjoy the necessary odium, it would perhaps be but reasonable in future to attach a more charitable meaning to this unavoidable infirmity of old age.

* See also an admirable article on Chaucer, in the *Retrospective Review*,

With reference, however, to the omission of certain objectionable passages, and the interpolation of a few lines to connect the thread of the interest, it is presumed that this licence will be readily permitted, on all sides, to the exigencies of the case. Another reason for sundry omissions may *occasionally* exist. Chaucer sometimes becomes very prolix, and disposed to lengthy digressions. They are generally excellent when humorous; when learned and grave, they are apt to become very tedious. He sometimes pauses on the threshold of the highest interest to give a long list of not very similar cases from history or scholastic lore. On one of these occasions he makes his heroine in her great anguish recount some eighteen tragic stories, taken from *Hieronimus contra Jovinianum*, l. i. c. 39. "In the Troilus and Cressida," observes Mr. Clarke, "there constantly intervene long see-saws of argumentative dialogue; and,

vol. ix. part 1, where a modern version, undertaken upon the same principle of restoring the original, is recommended as a *desideratum* in English literature.

above all things in such a narrative, a discourse extending to upwards of a hundred lines upon the doctrine of *Predestination* is put into the mouth of Troilus! The same defect of tediousness applies to some of the other extended compositions." Chaucer is also very fond of repeating the same things upon different occasions—and upon the same occasion. Whenever he alludes to a recent event in his narrative, he either tells it nearly all over again, or apologizes for not doing so, pleading that there is "no need." Sometimes with humorous petulancy he abruptly announces that he will *not* repeat the matter any more—as though he considered the reader wished to exact it from him. This peculiarity is solely attributable to the period at which Chaucer wrote—a period of religious and political controversies, while knowledge was so new that the difficulty of acquiring suggested proportionate fears of inability to communicate it efficiently, and induced all sorts of repetitions in order to prevent misunderstandings. This is why Chaucer's

poetry often reminds us of remote times, and even suggests old age in the writer: in every other respect he is the most invariably fresh and youthful poet ever given to the world. His poetry not only has the freshness of morning in it, but gives the impression of the youngest heart enjoying that freshness.

It is necessary to enter into some examination of the versification and rhythm adopted by Chaucer. The subject is fraught with difficulties; and when to this is added the consideration that it must involve the whole theory of the structure of English poetry, on which no satisfactory essay has ever yet been written, many indulgences may be solicited of the reader in any attempts which may be made to "break up the ground" for future disquisitions*.

* The learned and elaborate "Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer," by Tyrwhitt, may be regarded as one of the main foundations on which future developments should be built. But while he discourses on *metres* very much in the usual classical way, his notions of *rhythm* are very limited. It is clear that he has a practical knowledge of the rhythm of Chaucer, yet in principle he generally reverts to the pedantries of metre, which require strict regularity in numbers and position of accents. Otherwise his Essay is a valuable work, clearly written, and not at all stuffed with learned words and Greek and Roman distinctions. There has been enough

Our position is, that Chaucer was a most harmonious and melodious poet, and that he was a perfect master of the various forms of versification in which he wrote; that the principle on which his rhythm is founded fuses and subjects within itself all the minor details of metre; that this principle, though it has been understood only by the few, and never systematically explained, is, more or less, inseparable from the composition of an harmonious versification in the English language; and that he, the first man, if not unrivalled in the varied music of his verse, has scarcely been surpassed by any succeeding poet.

In opposition to this, before proceeding to such demonstrations of the foregoing positions as may be

of this: the fundamental *principle* is what is now wanted. An article "On Dramatic Versification," recently appeared in the *Monthly Chronicle*, in which was displayed a spiritual comprehension of the question; but it failed in its effect, by carrying the technicalities to such a pitch as to give a series of stanzas as illustrations, from which *all the words were excluded*, and only the long and short *accents* given "in rank and file" of verse,—like music to be imagined and understood by the sight of the *figures* of thorough-bass. The following position, however, is satisfactory. "The English language adapts itself to verse, not as in the Latin, by quantity, but (as the present writer conjectures was the case with the Greeks) by rhythm."

in our power, let us quote a note from Mr. Tyrwhitt's 'Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer,' in which the argument against us is fairly, though not fully, stated by a poet, whose name is justly honoured by his country.

"The verse of Chaucer, I confess," says Dryden in the Preface to his Fables, "is not harmonious to us. *They who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical*; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower, his contemporaries: there is a rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect. It is true I cannot go so far as he who published the last edition of him (Mr. Speght), for he would make us believe the fault is in our own ears, and that *there were really ten syllables in a verse where we find but nine*. But his opinion is not worth confuting; 'tis so gross and obvious an error, that common sense (which is a rule in everything but matters of Faith and Revelation) must convince the reader that *equality of numbers* in every verse which we call *heroick*, was either not known, or not always practised in Chaucer's age. It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses which are *lame for want of half a foot*, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronounciation can make otherwise."

This peremptory decision has never since, that I know of, been controverted, except by Mr. Urry, whose design of restoring the

metre of Chaucer, by a collation of MSS., was as laudable as his execution of it has certainly been unsuccessful *.

Tyrwhitt, vol. i.

The foregoing quotation affords us undeniable proof of the reason why Chaucer was considered, then and ever since, as a writer of rugged verses, which few (except his contemporaries, who understood the quantity he attached to his words, and the rhythm he adopted) could read so as to discover their continuous music. No doubt but Dryden was right in opposition to Mr. Speght. There are not *ten* syllables in every heroic verse of Chaucer : occasionally, but very rarely indeed, there are only nine ; sometimes there are eleven, reckoning a double syllable or double

* —“ The perplexing, corrupted, and arbitrarily innovated edition of Mr. Urry, who has marred by injudicious interpolations the rhythmus he pretended to amend, counting his fingers to the distraction of his ears (the common vice of all mechanical editors) and has perverted in many instances the very meaning of his author by conjectural readings, and has still further perplexed the orthography by a mode of spelling which is neither that of the days of Chaucer, of our own, nor of any intermediate age with which we are acquainted.”—*Retrospective Review*, vol. xiv. p. 314.

Severe as this censure may appear, it is thoroughly just. The only good thing in Urry's edition is the “Glossary,” which is by another hand.

rhyme at the end, as two; but continually there are eleven, without a final double syllable,—and this was Chaucer's favourite variation. But to assert that the poet's verse is rendered unmusical by any of these variations is a mistake, resulting from not perceiving the principle of his rhythm, a principle which is inseparable from a full or fair exercise of the genius of our language in versification. Every poet of eminence since his age, who has written heroic verses, has occasionally introduced lines of eleven syllables with melodious effect; those who wrote in the octo-syllabic measure have continually introduced lines of seven syllables with good effect; while the lyrical writers, who have adopted the octo-syllabic, have often introduced lines of seven syllables, eleven, and upwards; but their verses, so far from being rendered lame or inharmonious, became exquisitely musical chiefly from that circumstance. A few examples will render this sufficiently manifest; previous to which, however, let us turn to a passage in 'Troilus and Cressida,' where, with a

simplicity which is very touching, the Father Poet devoutly expresses his fears that, from the want of any fixed character in the language, the elements of which he was collecting and amalgamating, future times would not easily be enabled to do justice to his primitive labours—his meaning might be misunderstood, his measures appear unmusical.

And, for there is so great diversitie .
In English, and in writing of our tongue,
So pray I to God that none *mis-writ-e thee*,
Ne thee mis-metre for default of tongue ;
And read whereso thou be, or élés sung,
That thou be understood, God I beseech.

In this quotation, which conveys a very serious warning to all whom it may chiefly concern, an instance occurs of the introduction of the eleventh syllable. As the word *write*, in the third line, was pronounced with a soft intonation of the final *e* (as in the Italian), the word *to* would be regarded, on the principle of Dryden and Pope, as a superfluous syllable in the verse ;

and, certainly, if read on their general principle of laying an accent upon the fourth or fifth syllable of every line, it would sound lame enough. But “So pray I *to* God, &c.” was not Chaucer’s rhythm: he meant the line should be read as though it were written—

So pray I | t’ God | that none mis-write e’ thee.

Or thus :—

So pray-I to-God, &c.

It will therefore be perceived, that there is an implied partial contraction and junction of the two syllables “pray I” into the sound or time of one syllable; or, a contraction of the next two words by the elision of a vowel. Let us take another more striking example :—

There was also a Nun—a Prioress,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy.

Now, if it were true that an heroic verse must be incorrect whenever there is an inequality of syllables,

and if that by the term of "correct metre," which we find in continual use at the present time, is meant this literal equality, or conformity to a fixed number of syllables, then the second line of the above couplet must be considered quite incorrect in metre. But as any schoolboy who has learned to make heroic verses with his fingers' ends could instantly put this into the "correct metre" by the erasure of a word and a slight transposition ("That of her smiling simple was, and coy"), it is not to be supposed that a great poet, who had practised his art for some fifty years, could not have done the same, on this, and every other occasion, had he not chosen to adopt a more musical rhythm. A partial contraction of the three syllables of "simple and" into the sound of two syllables, is implied—that is, by a delicate modulation of the voice, as in the Italian; not with a harsh mechanical strictness. The line would then read thus:—

That of her smiling was full simpl'and coy.

There seems little doubt that Chaucer adopted this delicate gliding of one word into another from the French—*peuple—aimable*, &c.; nor might it be unaptly illustrated by the effects of the *slur*, the *glissé*, or the *appoggiatura*, in musical notation.

This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf.

The line may be read,—

This nobl' ensample to his flock he gave.

That is to say, it should be read with a feeling or instinct of the latent contraction; giving both words their fair utterance, but with a graceful blending of the vowels at their point of union.

That the same principle has been acted upon, whether consciously or unconsciously, by all succeeding English poets, is easy of demonstration. In all heroic poems eleven syllables will occasionally be found; there being either a manifest or implied contraction by apostrophe or syncope,—a modification of the principle of Chaucer, and far from an improvement, as

it tends to the elision of vowels, instead of melodiously blending them :—

“ This omen pleas’d, and as the flame aspires
With odorous incense Arcite heaps the fires.”

“ Wandering, I walk’d alone, for still methought
To some strange end so strange a path was wrought.”

“ Nine worthies were they call’d of different rites,
Three Jews, three Pagans, and three Christian knights.”

“ Such is not man, who, mixing better seed
With worse, begets a base degenerate breed.”

“ But fire, th’ enlivener of the general frame,
Is one, its operation is the same,
Its principle is in itself : while ours
Works as confederates war, with mingled powers.”

In the first of the foregoing quotations, it will be observed that there are eleven syllables in the second line ; but that the word of three syllables, “ odorous,” is no more to the ear than a word of two syllables—being read in the same time as if it were spelt *ode’rus*, though not pronounced so, (which would have a bar-

barous effect,) but rather as *oder'ūs*. In the second example there are eleven syllables in the first line; "wandering" being three syllables which are read in the time of two; and the same applies to the words occurring in the next two examples—"different" and "degenerate"—each of which contain a syllable which is not reckoned in the ten that comprise the foundation of the verse. In the first line of the last example there are thirteen syllables; one of these is visibly contracted by an apostrophe; but the others have been suffered to remain because the ear does not require the words "enlivener" and "general" to be palpably shortened into "enliv'ner" and gen'ral." But the strict metrical law propounded by various scholars would scarcely admit, one would think, such deviations, and yet refuse a similar license to Chaucer. All the foregoing quotations are taken from Dryden. They occur, among abundance of like examples in the course of his translation, or rather his paraphrase, of Chaucer's poems; though the reader would be puzzled

to bring any of them home to Chaucer. The same remarks will apply to Pope, from whose original poems, and elaborate paraphrases of Chaucer, similar examples may be collected.

Since, then, it is manifest that such masters of heroic versification upon the strictest classical model as were Dryden and Pope, could not avoid the introduction of these unobtrusive superfluities in their lines, it only remains to show that the difference between their method and that of Chaucer is not in principle, but only in degree, both being subject to the same inherent law. The reason why Chaucer's variations of rhythm challenge more attention, and require the sympathy and knowledge of the reader in order to be properly rendered, is from the superior vigour and palpable intention of the departure from regularity of sound in the sequence of a number of verses.

The Revé was a slendre cholerike man :

His berd was shave as neighe as ever he can.

Read as though it were written,—

The Reve-e-was a slender choleric man :
His beard was shave as nigh as ever'e can.

Again,—

Tucked he was, as is a frere, about ;
And ever he rode the hindmost of the route.

Read as though it were written,—

Tuckéd he was, as is a frere, about ;
And ever-'è-rode the hindmost of the rout.

Again,—

This Pardonere had hair as yellow as wax.

Read as though it were written,—

This Pardonere had hair as yell'w-as wax.

Or thus,—

This Pardonere had hair as yellowas wax.

Yet by no means with a harsh pedantic marking of

the implied contraction of words ; but merely read with that feeling, and a sense of the principle of union.

The devil made a Reve for to preche,
Or of a souter a shipman, or a leche.

Read as though it were written,—

The devil made a Reve-e for to preach,
Or of a souter-a shipman, or a leach.

Perhaps thus, for the sake of making it clearer, though hardly so good, the sounds being too much united :—

Or of a sout'ra shipman, or a leach.

Here is an example of a different kind,—

“ My lord the Monk,” quoth he, “ be merry of cheer !”

As though it were written, *merry'f* ; but read,—

“ My lord the Monk,” quoth he, “ be merry-of cheer !”

Thus, it is hoped, the fundamental principle of Chaucer's rhythm is made plain, though further diffi-

culties will require further elucidation. On this principle every English poet has acted in greater or lesser degree : the school of Dryden and Pope almost as little as possible ; that of Milton nearly to the utmost bounds which can safely be attempted without changing the heroic into a new class of metre. Chaucer was the first to introduce this metre in England ; and, as he made translations from Boccaccio at an early period of his life, and was also acquainted with the writings of Dante and Petrarch, all of whom had shown a great predilection for the study of heroic verse, there seems little doubt but that he adopted it from the Italian, as well as from the French, together with some peculiarities of those languages, until he had worked out a system of harmony of his own.

In defending Chaucer from the charge that his frequent superfluity of syllables renders his verse unmusical, Mr. Tyrwhitt refers to Milton, with the very apt remark, that “ whoever can taste the metrical harmony

of the following lines from Milton, will not be embarrassed how to dispose of the (seemingly) superfluous syllables which he may meet with in Chaucer :”—

Ominous conjecture on the whole success.

Paradise Lost, ii. 123.

A pillar of state ; deep on his front engraven—

Ibid. 302.

Celestial spirits in bondage, nor the abyss—

Ib. 658.

No inconvenient diet nor too light fare.

Ib. v. 495.

Things not revealed, which the invisible king—

Ib. vii. 122.

Here are two more examples of a different kind, and hundreds might easily be adduced :—

To whom thus Eve, with perfect beauty adorn'd.

Ibid.

Whom reason hath equal'd, force hath made supreme.

Ibid.

It is probable, that some readers may think the harmonies of the foregoing need elucidation quite as much as those quoted from Chaucer ; and, certainly the noble music of their rhythm is by no means so obvious to the general ear as those of the Father Poet.

Our Host-e saw well that the bright-e sun
The ark-of-his artificial day had run
The fourth-e part, and half an hour and more ;
And though he were not deep expert in lore,
He wist it was the eighte and twenty day
Of April that is messenger to May ;
And saw well that the shadow of every tree
Was as in length of the same quantitee
That was the body erect that causéd it ;
And therefore by the shadow he took his wit.

Chaucer.

Now it may be fairly suggested, that those who cannot discover the harmony of the foregoing lines should by no means pretend to any admiration of the versification of Milton.

But all this variety of rhythm, all these grand organ-stops, were destined to long periods of neglect after the death of their original composers. ‘ Gorboduck ’

the first English tragedy in blank verse, written about the year 1560, is as regular and smooth in every line as a pile of finely-planed mahogany planks. Marlowe's lines, notwithstanding their great strength, for that lies in his thoughts and magnificent images, are for the most part as smooth and glossy as old ivory. From the time of Chaucer, varied harmonies were nearly lost until they again appeared in Spenser and Shakspeare. Those of Spenser bear but little resemblance to the rhythm of Chaucer : they are more flowing, stately, and luxurious, but not so vigorous, nor with that frequent lightheartedness which resembles the singing of happy childhood. Shakspeare, on the whole, is regular in his numbers ; that is to say, he usually maintains the ten syllables, varied with the eleventh, as previously illustrated in Chaucer and others. When not inspired by any passionate emotion or profound philosophy, (and how rarely is this !) Shakspeare's versification is somewhat broken up, and unmusical, nor does he care about introducing an alexandrine line of no very flowing

symmetry ; or terminating his lines with such words as *of, in, and, with, by, for, to, &c.*, which are totally destructive of rhythm ; but on all great occasions his noble harmony of verse is unfailing and regular in its course. His varied music is, however, chiefly confined to the perfect disposition of accents and pauses, and seldom extends to the rhythmic management of additional syllables,—except in the almost unavoidable introduction of the eleventh, and occasionally the twelfth syllable.

“ Lines with double endings,” says Mr. Darley, “ are frequent in Shakspeare ; with triple, less so : but in him, single-ending, or common heroic verses without any supernumerary syllable, abound most. Hence, to a great degree, the firm, dignified, sonorous march of his numbers :—

“ *Timon (digging)*—Common Mother, thou,
Whose womb unmeasurable, and infinite breast,
Teems and feeds all ; whose self-same mettle,
Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man, is puffed,

Engenders the black toad, and adder blue,
The gilded newt, and eyeless venom'd worm,
With all the abhorréd births below crisp Heaven,
Whereon Hyperion's quickening fire doth shine ;
Yield him, who all thy human sons doth hate,
From forth thy plenteous bosom, one poor root, &c.

“ Here, out of twenty verses,” proceeds Mr. Darley, “ not one is over-measure, and the tone is a continuous grave hum, like the murmur of a sea-shore heard afar off.” Now, there are few who will not instantly coincide with the writer in his admiration of the harmonies of the foregoing passage—but not for the reason he adduces. The second line undoubtedly contains twelve syllables—not an alexandrine verse, into the rhythm of which it is not possible to be forced—but twelve full syllables worked with harmonious rhythm into the fundamental ten-syllable heroic. *This*, with submission, is what renders it dignified and sonorous. The third line most undoubtedly contains only nine syllables. Perhaps it is an accident—as with some similar instances in Chaucer—

perhaps it might have been done in order to heighten the effect of the preceding verse, and the one which follows*. For the next line contains twelve syllables, and is not an alexandrine. The words "Hyperion" and "quickenings" being contracted, the first into three syllables, the second into two, renders the line a legitimate heroic verse of strict metre; but it is not marked thus—and it is not only not necessary, but would be injurious to the rhythm, and destroy that very effect which Mr. Darley and everybody else so much admire. In the course of the twenty lines to which he refers, there are also four instances of eleven syllables,—fairly reducible to ten, by apostrophe, but not marked so, simply because the soft sounding of the eleventh is *needed* to the sonorous effect in question.

I trust the object of these strictures will not be

* And *perhaps* it is not quoted correctly by Mr. Darley, as most editions of Shakspeare read "*Oh thou, whose self-same mettle.*" In this case the verse will contain eleven syllables; or, more properly, ten and a half—*i.e.* ten with a double ending.

misunderstood. They are merely made with a view to clearing the question before us. The pleasure of reading such poetry, added to an habitual respect for the *idea* of the regular ten-syllable foundation, caused Mr. Darley, in this instance, to take the cause for granted by the effect. Otherwise, it would not be easy to understand how such a statement could have been made by a man of genius, with so good an ear. The following is the finest theory ever yet broached on poetical rhythm.

“Every true poet has a *song in his mind*, the notes of which, little as they precede his thoughts—so little as to seem simultaneous with them—do precede, suggest and inspire many of these ; modify and beautify them. That poet who has none of this dumb music going on within him, will neither produce any by his versification, nor prove an imaginative or impassioned writer : he will want the harmonizer which attunes heart, and mind, and soul—the mainspring that sets them in movement together. Rhythm, thus, as an enrapturer of the poet, mediately exalts him as a creator, and augments all his powers. A good system of rhythm becomes, therefore, momentous both for its own sake to the reader, and because it is the poet’s latent inspirer.”

Introduction to Beaumont and Fletcher.

The verse of Beaumont and Fletcher has often more freedom and variety of rhythm than that of Shakspeare, but seldom do they display an equal mastery over accents and pauses. They have not his precision, his dignity, and breadth. Their variations of rhythm are of a kind to change the heroic verse into a blank verse metre of a different kind, which may nevertheless be admirably suited to passages of a wild and joyous character, or to convey emotions of excessive and ungovernable passion. But they use it on all occasions, and this weakens the effect of their versification,—the variation almost becoming the metre, and therefore *no* variation.

The next great change that occurred in English versification was exhibited by Milton. His verse demands an understanding reader—"fit audience, though few." An ordinary good ear, or a natural good ear, is not sufficient to find any continuous satisfaction in his erudite harmonies: it must be refined by knowledge and practice. He found few followers. As his verse is the

most difficult to read properly of all verse in the language (obsolete or modern), it naturally followed, on the principle of extremes meeting, that the next change should be to something as easy as possible, and with as little variety.

This next change was originated by Sandys, followed and established by Waller, and brought to perfection and popularity during the time of Dryden and Pope. In Dryden there was what may be termed a grand regularity. His favourite measure was the heroic ten-syllable rhyming couplet; frequently varied by a triplet, in the shape of an alexandrine, or twelve-syllable line, and escaping the monotony to which he was rendered liable from his tendency to throw the first accent of most of his lines on the same syllables—(the fourth or fifth) by the great vigour of his spirit, and the heaping up of thoughts and waving forms as they fell in long swathes before his scything progress. Mr. Pope adopted one portion of his regularity, and rendered the English heroic metre perfect in its

sweetness and monotony by the almost invariable position of the first accent—which is with him the dominant—on the fourth or fifth syllable; the fourth most commonly. The great length of his melodious and elegant paraphrase from Homer, and the circumstance of its being, at one time, introduced in most schools, so that the young ear was first attuned to this unvarying sequence of numbers, and taught to consider it as the most perfect model for imitation, will easily account for the general diffusion of an exclusive taste in versification. The majority of young readers never recovered it. Instead of trusting to the ear for the rhythm, and the understanding for the accent or pause, they counted *ten* upon the fingers, and denounced every thing (unless restrained by the authority of some great name,) which did not answer the very natural expectations of confirmed habit. During the last twenty years, however, there has been a manifest change of taste in this respect. Still, it is no wonder such a style became, and so long continued, popular. It required no sort of culti-

vation of the ear to read it, the movement of almost every couplet being exactly the same. There was no need to study how to deal with variations and refinements of rhythm and pauses. To read one couplet smoothly, was to master the whole art; and the writing of verses, after this method, has been found sufficiently easy of attainment, as the world has but too often seen. It is to be remembered that this bears reference only to theories of versification, not to the genius or talent of which the practice of different poets may have made them the medium.

The first great movers, in our own day, of the changes of style in versification, were Wordsworth, in blank verse, and Coleridge in lyrical composition. It may be said, as a distinguishing characteristic in this question, that the former commenced a restoration of the varied accents and pauses adopted by Milton; the latter of the varied rhythm of Chaucer in his ballads and romaunts*.

* The 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' re-invigorated and extended the taste for the 'Percy Reliques.'

By the unexpected transports of our age
Carried so high, that every thought—which looked
Beyond the temporal destiny of the kind—
To many seem'd superfluous ; as no cause, &c.

Wordsworth.

The first, second, and fourth lines contain eleven syllables, and the third has twelve ; yet the effect, which is full and harmonious, would be totally destroyed by the awkward pedantry of contracting the sound of such words as “temporal,” “destiny,” and “superfluous,” into *temp'ral*, *dest'ny*, *superfl'ous* ! Of course it is not the legitimate propriety of their contraction that is now brought in question—but the rhythm, the number of syllabical sounds, which would be rendered deficient by actual contraction.

The following examples are equally illustrative of our argument :—

Now seek upon the heights of Time the source
Of a Holy River, on whose banks are found, &c.

Wordsworth.

His prominent feature like an eagle's beak—

Wordsworth.

Which the chaste Votaries seek beyond the grave—

Ibid.

Slowly the cormorant aims her heavy flight—

Ibid.

Ah, when the Body, round which in love we clung—

Ibid.

It must be borne in mind that these examples of rhythm, as well as those previously given, are all read under the greatest disadvantage by being abruptly separated from the context, and therefore losing all the re-solution of apparent discords, as well as the impetus of their cadence from above. Yet even in this disjointed state, it is believed that few critics would choose to fall back upon the school of the past century, in order to insist upon such ungainly sounds as *vot'ries*, *prom'nent*, or *corm'rant*, for the sake of the regular ten syllables, and to the manifest injury of the poet's sense

and intention. There must be some sound of the additional syllable given—and, if so, why not the additional syllable itself whenever needful?

The restoration of a more free, manly, varied, and harmonious versification was now vigorously undertaken by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt,—the latter taking the lead in emancipating the public ear from the monotony of the heroic rhyming couplet. The change was fitfully followed by Byron in various compositions; by Keats; and by Campbell, and Moore, though very guardedly.

Among examples from poets best known to the world, one or two from the poets least known, however worthy of “divine honours,” may not be unacceptable.

Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Keats.

Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold.

Ibid.

d

Were pent in regions of laborious breath ;
Dungeon'd in opaque element, to keep—

Keats.

Blazing Hyperion on his orbéd fire.

Ibid.

Every one of these verses contains eleven syllables, contracted into ten by implied apostrophe ; yet whether marked or implied, eleven syllables should be articulated, or else we should have the ugly jargon of such sounds as *op'ning*, *per'lous*, *bast'on'd*, *labor'ous*, *dung'on'd*, *Hyper'on*, which no poet, or person of any ear could tolerate*. If then we must of necessity have the sound of this eleventh syllable, why not, as before observed, have the syllable itself, whenever advantageous ?

Smiling a god-like smile, the innocent light—

Tennyson.

Reign thou above the storms of sorrow and ruth.

Ibid.

* “ — That indolent elision of the vowel, which our Midas ears have suffered to be carried to such an extent, and by which so many of our dissyllables have been melted, or rather crushed into monosyllabic words.”—*Retrospective Review*, vol. ix. p. 179.

From many a wondrous grot and secret cell.

Tennyson.

And showering down the glory of lightsome day.

Ibid.

The first three of the foregoing verses contain eleven syllables; the last, twelve,—and what ear would desire to reduce them to ten?

The exquisite rhythm of some of Coleridge's lyrics was recognized with admiration by Scott and Byron; and the latter particularly noticed these lines in *Christabel*. They are an example of perfect mastery in musical versification :—

The night is chill ; the forest bare ;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak ?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek—
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up to the sky.

Coleridge, in great glee, once said to a friend, "They think they are reading verses of eight syllables, and every now and then they read eleven." Doubtless he meant that he did not compose on the syllabical theory at all, but on that of simple *musical time*. The whole of the foregoing quotation is a rhythmic variation upon the eight-syllable metre. The first couplet contains the regular number of syllables. The third line begins the process of stealing off into a different quantity, by a latent apostrophe. The fourth line is the regular eight syllables, suggesting that all is going on regularly. The fifth line gently drops into seven syllables, producing a vague desire for some increase. The sixth is again the regular eight syllables, and leads—both by its rhythm, and by its sense, which forbids a pause at the end of the line—into the seventh line, which contains nine syllables; both the rhythm and the sense of this line also leading into the next line, which contains ten syllables; this, too, is led, by the same means, into the next line, which is nine syllables; and again,

in the same way, into the closing line, which contains eleven syllables.

Here is another example,—

Thus Bracy said : the Baron the while
Half-listening heard him with a smile ;
Then turn'd to Lady Geraldine,
His eyes made up of wonder and love ;
And said in courtly accents fine,
' Sweet maid, Lord Roland's beauteous dove,
With arms more strong than harp or song,
Thy sire and I will crush the snake !'
He kiss'd her forehead as he spake,
And Geraldine, in maiden wise,
Casting down her large bright eyes,
With blushing cheek and courtesy fine,
She turned her from Sir Leoline ;
Softly gathering up her train
That o'er her right arm fell again ;
And folded her arms across her chest,
And couched her head upon her breast, &c.

Thus, we find introduced in the groundwork of the octo-syllabic measure, the most musical variations. The foregoing illustration contains ten lines of the regular eight syllables, four lines of nine syllables, two lines of

seven syllables, and one (the second line) which by a gentle contraction may be said to have eight syllables and a half. Yet all these superfluities and deficiencies, as they have been called, so far from producing an effect of roughness or lameness, all work well together, and melt their several melodies into the general harmony.

Now let the reader observe the lines that follow. Notwithstanding the changes that have occurred in the language, and without “considering their great age,” who can fail to perceive the close resemblance of their musical rhythm to the lines just quoted, even though they are employed in the portraiture of old age?—

Elde was painted, after this,
That shorter was, a foot, I wis,
Than she was wont in her yonghede * :
Unneth † her self-e she might feed.
So feeble and eke so old was she,
That faded was | all her beautee.

* Youth.

† Scarcely.

Full sallow was waxen her co-lóure ;
 Her head, for hoar, was white as flour.
 I wis great qualme ne were it, none,
 Ne sinne, although her life were gone.
 All waxen was her body unwelde,
 And drie, and dwined, all for elde:
 A foule forwelked * thing was she
 That whilom round and soft had be.

The time that passeth night and day,
 And rest-e-less traváyleth aye,
 And stealeth from us so privily
 That to us seemeth sikerly †
 That it in one point dwelleth ever ;
 And certes it ne resteth never,
 But goeth so fast and passeth aye
 That there n' is man that think-e may
What time that Now Present is !"

These lines are taken verbatim from Chaucer. Even the old spelling is retained, with two or three trifling exceptions, such as *feed* for "fede," and *hoar* for "hore." It is presumed that no one will question the musical movement of the rhythm. The fundamental metre is

* O'erwrinkled.

† Certainly.

the octo-syllabic, varied by lines of seven and nine syllables, the origin of which may be found in the old French *Fabliaux*. On this principle Coleridge wrote his "Christabel," Shelley his "Rosalind and Helen," and Byron his "Giaour*." Notwithstanding the obsolete words, who can fail to perceive the musical rhythm of the following?—

His jambeux were of cuirboullie† ;
 His swerd-es shethe of ivorie ;
 His helm of latoun bright ;
 His sadel was of rewel bone ;
 His bridel as the son-ne shone,
 Or as the moon-e light.

His spéré was of fine cyprés
 That bodeth werre, and nothing peace ;
 The hedde ful sharp yground ;
 His stédé was all dappl-e grey—
 It goeth an amble by the way,
 Ful soft-e-ly and round.

Chaucer.

* See also Tennyson's poems of 'The Lotos-eaters'—'The Death of the Old Year,' and 'The Hesperides.'

† *Jambeux*, leggins, boots; *cuirboullie*, prepared leather; *swerdes*, sword's; *latoun*, metal of a brass colour; *sadel*, saddle; *rewel bone*, the word is not certainly known.

Let us take a few lines of a different movement of rhythm from Shelley's "Euganean Hills." The poem is written chiefly in lines of seven syllables, like Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of misery,
Or the mariner worn and wan
Never thus could journey on,
Day and night, and night and day,
Drifting on his dreary way,
With the solid darkness black
Closing round his vessel's track, &c.

Here we find two lines of eight syllables each, and one containing nine, beautifully harmonizing with lines of seven syllables. Surely this is incomparably superior to an undeviating sing-song governed by the fingers' ends? It is presumed that the problem of superfluous or deficient syllables is thus practically solved, and the whole question of harmony thrown upon its primitive elementary principle,—the rhythm. Nor is this intended to apply only to lyrical metres, but also

to the heroic—for in that metre is the last battle to be fought of a question which was practically settled by Chaucer and Milton in the most marked manner, and more or less by all succeeding poets of whatever theory.

We have seen, by a previous extract, the serious fears Chaucer entertained of future times *missing his metre*. Here is one of his half modest, half humorous touches on the subject, written in the same measure as the quotation just made from Shelley:—

God of science, and of light,
 Apollo ! through thy great-e might,
 This little last book now thou gie*,
 Now that I will for maistrie
 Here art poetical be shewde.
 But, for the rime is light and lewde†,
 Yet make it somewhat agree-able
Though some verse fayle in a syll-able,
 And that I do no diligence
 To shew-e craft-e—but sen-tence ‡.

* *Thou gie*, guide thou.

† *Lewde*, rude, inartificial. He chose to say this “of his meek courtesy”—but his rime was most refined and skilful—the wonder and delight of his country.

‡ To show my skill, but some good sense.

He plainly means that he depends mainly, not upon his polish of style, but the good matter he has to offer : this is what he wishes his readers to attend to, even though he *should* fail in a syllable. In the following quotation his humour richly shows itself. It is as though he expected what would happen to his verses in the progress of time. He seems to be laughing at us with quaint *bonhomie* as he thus honestly propounds his case :—

Tell me this now, faithfully !
 Have I not provéd thus simplee,
 Without-en any subtlety
 Of speeche—or great prolixity
 Of term-es of philosophy—
 Of figu-res of poetry—
 Or' co-lours of rhetoricke—
 Perdie ! it *ought-e* thee to like !
 For hard lan-guage and hard matére,
 Is incombrous for to here,
 At on-es : wost thou not well this ?
 And I answe-re-d—and said, ' Yes !'

House of Fame.

This very plainly shows that his language was any-

thing but cumbersome in his own time, when the particular quantity and accent of his words was familiar to all ears. If his versification does not seem melodious now, it is because we “miss his metres” for “default of tongue,” or from not knowing how to *read* them—a misfortune to which Milton is always liable under the same circumstances of his reader not happening to have an ear sufficiently cultivated, and acquainted with the structure of his verse.

Of the occasional deficiencies or “lameness” in his verse, of which Chaucer has been accused, it is hoped that little need now be said. In the first place, we are to allow for his quantities, so far as we know them, or can feasibly conjecture what they were. In the second place, we are to give to a great poet who has accomplished so much harmony which *is* manifest, due credit for many instances where we are unable to perceive it, from our deficiency of knowledge. Thirdly, we are to allow for the errors of copyists, of whose ungodly pens Chaucer shows himself to be in much

dread,—in his address to Adam Scrivener, his amanuensis, and on other occasions. It might be suggested, fifthly, that something should be allowed for the unsettled condition of the English language at his time, and that it was accounted an accomplishment for a man to be able even to write his own name. But this consideration I do not care to dwell upon in the case of one who shows such mastery. The main ground of defence exists in the examples given from modern poets—whose rich and harmonious versification is fully recognized—demonstrating that the occasional introduction of lines which are short by half a foot, or more (as well as those which pass the common bounds of length), of the regular quantity of a particular metre, may enhance the power or beauty of the rhythm.

A manly man to ben an abbot able.
Full many a dainty horse had he in stable ;
And when he rode men might his bridle hear
Gingling in a wistling wind as clear
And eke as loud, as doth the chapel bell, &c.

Chaucer.

Surely no lover of fine poetry would wish to change the music of the fourth line, because it is only nine syllables. To do that would lose the very effect for which the line has always been admired.

I see well that ye have on my distress
Compassion, my faire Canacé—

Chaucer.

Is there not a charm in the simplicity of that second line, the effect of which might be injured by adding the two syllables of which it seems deficient according to what is called strict metre? But here is a more difficult example to deal with—the most difficult, indeed, that I can find.

For though I had you to-mórw again,
I might as well holde Aprill from rain
As hold-e you to maken stedfast.

Chaucer.

The first line may be made metrical in various ways of accentuation; the second may be nine syllables or ten, according as we call “April,” *A-prill*, and accent

the *e* in “holde,” or not; but the third line seems a clear case of intentional shortness, in order to produce the sound of an abrupt and fixed decision. Nevertheless, as “stedfast” may have been sometimes pronounced *stedéfaste* (*stede-e-fast*) shall we suppose that this is likely to be one of the many words which must in all probability have been wrongly copied in some of the manuscripts, or that the line has been otherwise mutilated? The accidental omission of the word “you” which might have been repeated in the manuscript, would settle the matter at once,—

As hold-e you to maken you stedfást.

Even if nothing were allowed for the “wear and tear” of several hundred years, something must be conceded to the habitual skill of a great poet, who is scarcely ever found really “halting” in his verse, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of his long journey down to us, and the changed ears of modern times. Again; can we not by a similar process—though it is to be feared even the imaginary change may be dis-

agreeable to some of the lovers of Chaucer—restore the two previous examples of short lines to their full ten syllables, by reading, in the one, *gingéling* for “gingling,” or else *windé* for “wind?” and in the other, giving the quantity most commonly attached to such words by Chaucer, and sounding “compassion” as *compássiôn*.

I see well that ye have on my distress
Compas-si-on, my fair-e Canacé.

This latter I believe to be the quantity intended by Chaucer—an opinion justified by his habitual practice. To be brief, I cannot but believe that the alleged deficiency in some of Chaucer’s heroic verses is founded on thoroughly fallacious grounds, and that out of any five thousand heroic lines in the ‘Canterbury Tales,’ there cannot be produced more than five examples of short lines, which may not be reconciled by accentuation on Chaucer’s usual method! Surely, if this be found true, these five may be allowed to the lapse of four or five hundred years, and the errors of copyists? Of the short lines introduced in the octo-syllabic and other

measures, enough has been said to show the music which may result from such a disposition of quantities. But in the heroic, it is my opinion, after long examination, that almost all, if not all, Chaucer's rhythmic variations are produced by a trifling *increase* in the syllables, and a change in the position of the accents; not by any shortening of his numbers. The following illustrations are highly characteristic :—

His brother weepeth and wailleth privily—

The quantity is thus accommodated,—

His brother weep'th and wailleth privily—

Read thus,

His brother weepethand wailleth privily.

This movement of the line is finely suited to the abandonment of a secret grief. It would have no such effect if reduced to order by cutting out the word “and,” according to the modern ideas of metre. One of the first rules to be laid down for the right reading of

Chaucer, is *not* to expect him to obey the law of Mr. Pope, and lay his strongest accent upon the fourth or fifth syllable.

That sin I see the gret-e gentillesse
Of him, and eke I see well your distress,
That him were lever have* shame (and that were ruth)
Than ye to me should breken thus your truth—

The third line is thus justified,—

That him were lev'r'ave shame (and that were ruth)

The words “lever have” should be read rapidly, as if only *two* syllables, in order to convey the vehemence of the feeling,—

That him were leverhave *shame*—and that were ruth—

Our last illustration is one of singular energy,—

This ilk-e text held he not worth an oyster !
And I say his opi-ni-on was good.
What † shulde he studie, and make himselven wood ‡
Upon a book in cloister alway to pore !

* *Lever have*, rather have.

† *What*, is often used for “What is this?” “For what?” “Why?”

‡ *Wood*, wild, mad, furious.

The variation is thus reducible,—

What shulde he studi'nd make himselven wood
Upon a book in cloist'ralway to pore !

The words “ study and ” are thus to be pronounced as two syllables instead of three ; and the four syllables of “ cloister alway ” are to be given in the time of three syllables. Yet, be it again observed, this contraction is not to be harshly given ; but all the words of what we may term the *appoggiatura*, fairly and clearly enunciated, though in a more rapid manner. One of the best general rules for reading such passages, especially when of such vigour as the foregoing, is to read with an unhesitating and thorough-going purpose, to the utter defiance of old metrical misgivings, and that thrumming of fingers' ends, which is utterly destructive of all harmonies not comprised in the common chord. This rational boldness will furnish the best key to the impulse which directed the poet in writing such lines. The couplet in question may be thus modernized :

Why should he study, and make himself half mad,
Upon a book in cloister ever to pore !

It hence appears that the secret of Chaucer's rhythm in his heroic verse, which has been the baffling subject of so much discussion among scholars *, is simply a trifling increase in the syllables, occasionally introduced for variety, and founded upon the same

* A writer on the subject, endeavouring to show that Chaucer did not write in *pentameters*, says, " witness this couplet ;"—

" Tragedy is to sayn a certain story
As olde bookes maken us memorie."

Which he thus scans,—

Trá | gedie | is to | sayn a | certain | storie
As | old-e | book-es | maken | us me- | morie.

He treats the "pretended iambics" of the following with contempt, as things not to be endured by the ear, even with a monosyllable at the end of the line:—

Trágé | dy is | to sayn | a cer- | tain story | &c.

Let us throw the lines into a brisk canter,—

Trág-e-dy | ís-to-sayn | á-cer-táin | story
As-old-é | book-es-má | ken-us mé | móríe.

It is not more preposterous than the other attempts. I submit that this is an arbitrary matter, mainly dependent on the difference of ears and scholastic fancies, and that this system of scanning,—all the talk about hexameters and pentameters, iambics and trochees, dactyls and spondees, and other pickings of dry bones,—are totally inapplicable to the fundamental principle of English verse. It would be far nearer the truth were we to call our scanning gear by such terms as systole and diastole,—metre being understood as muscle, and pulsation as rhythm,—varying with every emotion.

laws of contraction by apostrophe, syncope, &c. as those followed by all modern poets ; but employed in a more free and varied manner, all the words being fully written out, the vowels sounded, and not subjected to the disruption of inverted commas, as used in after times. An additional remark is necessary to the full understanding of this theory by Chaucer's practice. He throws the first pause or accent in his line upon even syllables generally, and very often, in heroic verse, upon the fourth or fifth (as with nearly all subsequent poets in *that* metre), but he varied this by sometimes throwing the pause or accent upon uneven syllables, and in other parts of the line, so as to produce an ambling movement—a *cantabile* effect—sometimes that of a dance—sometimes an impression of energy of thought or action. Milton adopted the same principle, but used it in a way that produced a towering and bounding—a magnificent, or a desolating effect. One of the chief reasons why the heroic versification of Chaucer has not been hitherto understood, is because

the *same rhythmic principle of variety which governed his octo-syllabic metre, he also applied, at proper intervals, to his heroic metre.* We all understand the application of this rhythm to the octo-syllabic metre (as displayed in the old Ballads, and by Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, &c.), but we are not prepared for its occurrence in heroic verse; and, endeavouring to force a rhythm of this kind into the law of *Papal* regularity, we are apt to place the accents on the wrong words, even when in direct opposition to the sense, and thus render the line unaccountably obdurate to all metrical harmonies.

Much more remains to be said of the ultimate capacities of rhythm in our language. Let us hope that we may receive this from the hand most competent, by his own practice, to instruct us in the very marked change which has been for some years dawning upon the realms of English versification. The poets who have in our own times made the greatest advances in rendering our language malleable to varied lyrical modulations, are Coleridge, Shelley, Leigh Hunt, and

Tennyson. But the "Legend of Florence" develops principles of rhythm, which appear to be scarcely amenable to the same laws. It contains abundant examples of verses which are precisely on the principle of Chaucer's rhythm,—followed by others which do not belong to any known principle, and yet are rhythmical. The proof of the mastery and the success, is that few people have discovered in it any particular difference to other blank verse, except that it seemed to flow on more freely ; and no one has "complained of his ear." It is a refinement upon the rhythm adopted chiefly by Beaumont and Fletcher, but used discriminately, and with taste and judgment. Yet many of the lines, which seem perfectly licentious as to metre, are not so in reality.

Whose only shallow intent is to delay,
Or to divert, the sole dire subject—me.

Soh ! you would see the spectacle ! you who start, &c.

Legend of Florence.

The second line contains the regular syllables ; the first and third have each eleven ; yet the first is exactly

the rhythm of Chaucer, while the third is of a different rhythm altogether, only reducible by some barbarous pronunciation of “spectacle,” as *spect’cle*,—and therefore *not* to be reduced.

But never feeble enough to want the strength, &c.

Ibid.

This also is Chaucer’s rhythm, the words “feeble” and “enough” uniting in the sound of *feeblenough*.

The fire of the heavenward sense of my wrongs crowns me !

The voice of the patience of a life cries out of me !

Every thing warns me : I will *not* return !

Ibid.

The first line is in strict accordance with old principles, (“the heavenward,” or th’ heav’nward;) the second is a novel metre. The third line, though containing ten syllables, has the sound of a short line—an abrupt jar, as of a sudden pause, and a question settled by passionate emotion. This admirable effect is accomplished by the force with which the accents are thrown on the first and third syllables, the second

being scarcely sounded ; but which effect would not be so great were it not for the lengthened vigour of the two preceding lines. But the novelty of the metre of the second is chiefly that of its relative position : it bears a close resemblance to the beautiful prose rhythm in which many parts of the Bible are written. The change which the introduction of this latter rhythm may bring about is likely, as Mr. Darley anticipates, “to entail important consequences on our National Poetry ;” but not dangerous consequences, I think *. It will only be the introduction of a new metre—the

* “What a refined language like ours most needs, is precisely strength, not elegance: civilization has a corruptive, enervating influence, and dissolves the vigour of language into a voluble feebleness soon enough, without our special aid, &c.”—*Darley's Introduction to Beaumont and Fletcher*.

This is the only argument that can be adduced against the cultivation of the new metre in question ; and it might be applied with almost equal force to lyrical compositions, and to all attempts to improve and dulcify the very harsh and obstinate genius of the English language, so as to render it harmonious and flowing. But power *will* be power, in any form of verse it adopts ; and since strength can take care of itself, why not give free way to all possible beauty and elegance ? When strength dies out among us, it will be from “the enervating influence of civilization”—and not for the want of a close attention to ten syllables. I submit, with every respect for the reasons which influence Mr. Darley, that the “Legend of Florence” should be “taken in evidence” of the profound philosophy, strength of passion, and pure heart, which may co-exist with elegance and a flowing rhythm.

Composite upon the Corinthian order of blank verse—in which some will succeed, and others make themselves ridiculous; just as we find with respect to the metres now in use, only far more conspicuously from the novelty, and therefore far more easily checked. Nevertheless, as we learn from all experience, that the verses “written in early youth,” whether we speak of their matter or their modulation, are only fit for early youth to read; that the same fact is perceptible as it graduates into the vapid level of a “prize poem;” and that, however easy it may be to acquire the art of writing with unbroken regularity in heroic (or any other) metre, it still appears that scarcely any one has ever mastered this art, so as to express profound thoughts, and powerful images, with the three great requisites of *clearness*, *conciseness*, and *suitable rhythm*, in a less period than twenty years of practice, (not including juvenile attempts,) so I should be disposed to join Mr. Darley in a warning against the too hasty departure from the fundamental structure of the ten

syllables. Nor do I fear the imputation of any methodistical bigotry to "the common metre," in adding, that even the variable modulations to which the heroic verse is legitimately open, (the rhythm of Chaucer, Shakspeare, and Milton, being all different, yet all founded on a constant recognition of the original structure) should be adopted only with the greatest care of ear, and very gradual practice.

On the subject of Chaucer's *rhymes*, together with his *lyrics*, or ballads and romances, more remains to be said; but as this would occupy a larger space than can now be spared, it must be deferred to the Second Division of this work.

The writings of Chaucer present so many topics of great interest which are comparatively new to the mass of the public, that it is impossible to compress them all within our present bounds. Out of the five volumes of Tyrwhitt's work, in the last edition, which contain no other poems but the 'Canterbury Tales,' two volumes and a half are devoted to comments, notes, glossary, &c.—

all needful,—and incomplete. The voluminous labours of Godwin are also well known, yet how much has he left undone, and even unapproached * !

All that can be said at present with regard to Chaucer's *rhymes*, must be confined to noticing the great abundance of rhyming materials collected by the Father Poet, with his vigorous freedom in the mode of working them up and using them, he being his own rhyme-founder and law-giver. His antipathy to the formal tie of a series of couplets, is a striking peculiarity. The necessity which the majority of writers in the heroic rhyme have entailed upon themselves of always bringing the sense to a completion at the end of a couplet, thus neatly enclosing everything in separate bivalve cells, has been aptly designated by Mr. Wordsworth as “ an oyster-shell confinement.” Chaucer very seldom places a full stop in the body of a

* None of the Poems of Chaucer—contradistinguished from the Tales—have hitherto been made known to the public, even by a paraphrase, except the ‘ Flower and the Leaf.’ This circumstance will explain the motive which has influenced the selection and arrangement comprised in this First Division of his works.

line, but continually breaks the monotony of the couplet-effect by placing a full stop at the end of the first line. He is also very fond of ending a paragraph, or division, with the first line of a couplet, the answering rhyme being given as the opening of the next division. He adopted this from the old French poets.

The genius of Chaucer was equally great in the profoundest pathos, and the richest humour. The one sends a broad ray of laughing light through the proximate vistas and long dormitories of our general knowledge; the other goes direct to the depths of the human heart, leaving all its pulses aching and trembling, till the very soul seems lost in bitter tears. His knowledge of character was so extensive, and so deep, that his men and women, in all essential principles, are as true and fresh at the present day as when he drew their portraits. His sympathy was universal. Universality of sympathy does not preclude some antipathies; at all events those who feel strongly, cannot feel equally for all things—good, bad, mixed,

or half empty—and yet, I think it would not only be impossible to find any downright, personified, and well-followed-up antipathy in all Chaucer, but that no objectionable men or things can be found in his writing without their “one touch of nature,” which brings them within the range of human sympathy. After portraying the most impudent, gross, and unprincipled dog that could well be conceived, the poet suddenly turns round and assures you that “A better fellow should a man not find!”—and then proceeds to recount the good qualities, which, under his circumstances, render him not so bad as we fancied. Even the Devil is sometimes brought home to human sympathies. The ‘Frere’s Tale’ presents a striking instance; and in speaking of the anguish of a lover, who is lying in torment amidst the flames of a hopeless passion, Chaucer tells us that “he *languisheth* as doth a *fury* in hell.” He introduces Death in a dramatic scene as a very poor old man, too old to live, yet who cannot escape from life, and beats upon his mother, the earth, praying to be let in!

Of the ludicrous anachronisms in Chaucer, it will be sufficient to say that they by no means resulted from want of knowledge. It was a habit of the old imaginative writers; and all writers of imagination have a strong tendency to the same merging of time, place, and circumstance, in universal truth. He grafts the age of chivalry on the antique tree of time. It is therefore presumed that the reader will be wisely pleased on his first introduction to Mars the *knight*; Phœbus the *chivalrous bachelor*; *Saint Venus*, &c.

Extraordinary as were the comic and humorous powers of Chaucer, his pathos is his greatest characteristic. In this respect he has no equal except Shakspeare; while for the frequency of his recurrence to such emotions, and their long sustained and unmitigated anguish—the woes of years eating into the heart—several of Chaucer's stories are without any parallel,—even in the great Boccaccio, who furnished the deep ground-work of several of them. Few, if any, of Chaucer's stories are his own invention; many of

his poems are free translations. In comparing them with the sources of their origin—as in the case also of Shakspeare—one of the greatest proofs of his genius is made apparent by what he has *not* borrowed. As an historian of the characters, manners, and habits of his countrymen during his age, he stands alone for comprehensiveness and fidelity*.

In Chaucer's descriptions—whether of men or things—he is so graphic, so sure of eye and hand, so rich in the power of conveying objects of sense to the imaginations of others, that his words have almost the effect of substances and colours, so that you seem to feel and see the things rather than have the idea of them, which is all you get from most other writers. Certainly, the *green leaves* of Chaucer are among the very *greenest* we ever saw, the coolest and freshest; his *white* and *red*, the utmost realities the mind, apart from sensuous contact, can possibly apprehend of those colours.

* “Froissart, throughout his whole life, wrote only for princes.”

Hippisley.

“Mars, the red,” and the face of the Sompnour, are indelible impressions. His highly-finished portraits of men and women are, at times, “too much for you;” you expect to meet one or the other of them as you turn the next corner: their different voices haunt you; the horses they rode you would recognize any where. His garlands of daisies are so white and full of fresh fragrance in the loveliest mornings in May, that we can scarcely leave them to look at the troop of knights and ladies in various attire, who ride forth into the green meadows; nor can any of their melodious ditties excite a greater pleasure than the duet sung “in swete accord” by Chaunteclare with Dame Partlet, the hen, standing close at his side. The sun and the moon of Chaucer have in them all the wonder of our childhood; his daisies and his stars are those we first knew. His mirth is ever youthful, his grief wholly mature. His laughter is that of the very happiest heart; his “bitter salt tears” are identified with those few we

remember as the bitterest in our lives, and which are remembered for ever, because through them the sweetest hopes melted away and fell into the dust.

If these impressions, however incompletely expressed, and so little satisfactory to my own feelings about Chaucer, be found nevertheless to correspond, not only with the impressions of men whose judgments and opinions may be regarded as corroborative authority, both for me and others, but also with the feelings generally excited in the readers of his poetry, it cannot be at all requisite to dwell upon the noble and manly moral tendency of such writings. "If Chaucer is sometimes a coarse moralist," as Mr. Wordsworth has observed, "he is still a great one." His social moralities are evidently not idealized, but faithful to the condition of his time. They are honestly out-spoken; we know the worst of them; there is no disguise, no "flattering unction," no hypocrisy, and evidently no sense of wrong, or even impropriety. He was not well skilled in those "fashions of phraseology which

are sometimes taken for moral distinctions." As the social morals were without any regular bridles and patent bits, or with scarcely anything beyond a field-halter, and the rough manners and colloquial coarsenesses under no better restraint, these laxities and horse-gambols were not only the characteristics of a whole people, but probably even of the Court to which the poet was for so many years attached by an office. The Prioress, in the Prologue, was evidently one of the most high-bred and refined ladies of her time; yet she listens, together with the Nuns at her side, without any surprise or token of offence, to all the jovialities and unminced matters of mine Host, and certain of the Pilgrims, as they amble along on their very devout mission to Canterbury. No offence was meant; no offence was imagined. So much for the social; but Chaucer's abstract morality, and the moral tendency of all his serious writings, are always deep and universal. If the head be sometimes under an undue influence of time and place, the heart of his morality never errs.

It must therefore be as permanent in its beneficent effect as the noblest impulses of humanity, and must continue in advance of *our* times and of all periods of the world, until such emotions and impulses govern the general practice of mankind.

Nor was the innate refinement of the poet without a sufficient consciousness that certain portions of his stories might be offensive to some of his *readers*. He therefore gives due warning:—

For Goddé's love as deem not that I say
Of evil intent, but that I must rehearse
Their Talés all—allbe they better or worse,
Or ellés falsen some of my matére :
And therefore whoso list it not to hear
Turn over the leaf and choose another tale,
*For he shall find enough both great and small
Of storial thing that toucheth gentillesse,
And eke morality, and holiness.*

Chaucer.

But if the manners of the age were of a kind to regard with indifference, or only as food for merri-ment, several things which modern refinement will not

tolerate as subjects of discourse, nor recognise as the general practice, this circumstance involves the corresponding difficulty, not merely of making certain careful omissions or variations of the details of his matters-of-fact, but also of dealing with all manner of ejaculatory expressions incessantly occurring in his more free and humorous dialogue. A list of the oaths in common use at the time would appear a curious and very startling catalogue to those not prepared for the ultracatholic exhibition. Folks of both sexes, in all ranks, swore without reserve, and enjoyed it very much. The marked exception made in the person of the lady Prior-ess, is one great proof of this fact. They seem to have uttered oaths of all sorts so habitually that they often swore without knowing it, "as a gentleman switches his cane." Compound oaths, in the highest name, did not weigh the weight they do now. It is the converse of the comparative value of money in their time and ours—a few shillings with them being as much as a sovereign at present. It is plain, however,

that they did not swear with any definite intention or irreverence prepense, but “roundly.” They meant no harm : they only swore as a garnish—for lack of eloquence—to save more words—and from the exuberance of animal spirits “full of vent.” Now, to give to each of the Pilgrims his fair share of those ornamental studs, clasps, and clenches of discourse, is impossible in a modern version ; for this would not be truly modernizing Chaucer, inasmuch as it would attach to some of his words a revolting effect which he did not for an instant intend. Yet to omit them all is equally impossible in any version pretending to restore the original and its highly coloured historical portraitures. It is hoped, however, that while devout earnestness and impassioned feelings may fairly retain all their sacred appeals, such a modification or curtailment of these expressions in ordinary dialogue and merry moods has been adopted as shall strike a fair balance between a hazard of extreme offence and an uncongenial timidity.

A student of theology, Chaucer did not confine his

inquiries to school divinity; nor did he endeavour to reconcile all the abuses of the Church with the new readings and "improved" Christianity of some of its ministers. It is not to be inferred that he was a practical reformer in religion, any more than in politics, or that he made any systematic attacks upon abuses of any kind in church or state: he merely took them unawares by a side thrust, or a passing skirmish on his way. At the lax discipline and worldliness of so many members of the holy orders of his time, he generally contents himself with having a sly humorous hit, or giving an open rebuke. He is also fond of pursuing abstract inquiries into some of the abstruse questions of theology, and having pushed them to the verge of the dark precipice to which they are apt to lead, he stops abruptly—tells you that he leaves all these matters to "the clerks"—and quietly resumes his story with a gentle pace, "meek as is a maid," and as though no discussion of any kind had intervened, or was ever likely to disturb the sweet (humorous) equanimity of his thoughts.

As every true poet "has a song in his mind," yet more certainly has every great poet a religious passion in his soul. The emotion he derives from the thing created, is often too strong to dwell upon its imperfections, or rest satisfied in its beauty, and impels his imagination at once to ascend to the creative Principle, wherein alone it can find relief and repose. With this feeling doth the profoundly simple-hearted old poet call upon God, and upon Christ, through the voices of earth's many happy and many suffering children; with this thought doth he seek with aching eye to look through the darkness of forbidden knowledge, at the Tree that burns impalpably beyond; with this yearning doth his soul spring upward in divine rhythmic harmony with those spheres which are ever working while they sing.

Scattered, neglected, overgrown with weeds, and the dust of ignorance and olden time; thy page oft illegible as the pale cobweb, or the tattered banner whereon the name of the victor is confused with that of the vanquished, and the rest all faded,—Father of

English Poetry, thy hand-writing and the writing of the hands guided by thee, have found but a careless preservation among after generations. Somewhat of these primitive inspirations have been mutilated ; many damaged by errors of omission and intrusion ; many lost. Yet from the fulness and vitality of that genius once breathed over the lost prototypes,—the worm, the moth, and the mouldering years, have lived their lives and done their work upon *them*, without conveying the records into the all-compounding earth ; nor hath the silence of progressive ages been unbroken by a strange cry, at intervals, which told that CHAUCER was not gone into ultimate oblivion, but only sleeping till the modern world awoke. Sleeping, indeed, the deep sleep which follows great labours and long neglect, but, by those who were gazing with reverent love, still seen as of yore ;—by those who were listening, still heard,—

“ Singing with voice memorial—in the shade.”

A LIFE
OF
GEOFFREY CHAUCER ;

BY PROFESSOR LEONHARD SCHMITZ.

JEFFERY or GEOFFREY CHAUCER, the Homer of English literature, was born in the second year of the reign of Edward III., 1328. His birth-place has been the subject of much dispute among his biographers, but one passage in his own works renders it incontrovertible that he was born in London. In his 'Testament of Love,' he says, "The city of London, that is to me so dear and sweet, in which I was *forth-grown*, and more kindly love have I to that place than to any other in earth, (as every kindly creature hath full appetite to that *place of his kindly ingendure*)."

 Ano-

ther much disputed point is, whether Chaucer was of noble or plebeian origin. This question is, of course, of very small importance to us, who are not inclined to judge in any way of a man like Chaucer by his father or grandfather, but by his own worth as a man and a poet. Considering all circumstances, however, we think it almost unquestionable, that his parents, though not belonging to the nobility, were people of good condition; as we must infer from the manner in which they educated their son. The only circumstance which might seem to prove his noble descent, is his intimate connexion with the court; but this is no proof at all, for we must remember that, in those days of gallant chivalry, men of talent or genius were much more likely to meet with the support and encouragement of the great than in our own time, in which Mammon rules supreme.

Respecting the early life of our poet nothing is known; and the first account we have of him is, that, at the age of eighteen, he was entered a student of the university of Cambridge. This information we derive from a passage in the 'Court of Love,' a poem

which he wrote during his residence at Cambridge. To which college he belonged has never been clearly ascertained, though Speght, one of his early editors, from the detailed description which the poet, in his humorous story of the 'Miller of Trompington' (The Reve's Tale), gives of the localities, infers that it was Soler, or Scholar, or Clare Hall. How long he stayed at Cambridge is uncertain, and, in accordance with a custom not unfrequent at that time, he went from Cambridge to Oxford, where he is supposed to have translated the poem of 'Troilus and Cresida,' which he dedicated to his literary friends Gower and Strode, who were then students at Oxford. How long he remained at Oxford, and of which college he was entered, is again uncertain, though Wood, in his Annals, has recorded a tradition, that "when Wickliffe was guardian or warden of Canterbury College, he had for his pupil the famous poet called Jeffery Chaucer (father of Thomas Chaucer, Esq., of Ewhelme, in Oxfordshire), who, following the steps of his master, reflected much upon the corruption of the clergy." One of his biographers says that, when he left Oxford,

he was “an acute dialectician, an agreeable orator, an elegant poet, a grave philosopher, an able mathematician, and a devout theologist.”

Chaucer, after leaving Oxford, went to Paris. The university of that capital was in those times considered the central seat of learning and refinement for all Europe, and thousands of young men of all nations resorted thither to finish their education, and to acquire those accomplishments which, down to the close of the last century, were almost throughout Europe thought indispensable to a gentleman. During his stay on the continent, he visited several parts of France and the Netherlands; and, on his return to England, he is said to have entered himself of the Inner Temple to study the municipal law. But this last statement rests on the very feeble authority of an anecdote related by Speght, that Chaucer, during his residence in the Temple, “was fined two shillings for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street.”

During this period, Chaucer translated Boethius ‘*De Consolatione Philosophiæ*,’ during the middle ages the most popular work of any Roman writer next to

Valerius Maximus. The attention of Edward III., who was anxious to put a stop to the exclusive use of the French language, especially in public transactions, and who wished to be looked upon not only as a gallant warrior, but as the patron of science and literature, was necessarily attracted by the uncommon talents which the young poet had already evinced. It must have been about the year 1358 that the King made Chaucer his *valettus*, for thus he is styled in a document dated the 20th of June, in the 41st of Edward III. The meaning however of this title is not clearly ascertained, some think it equivalent to *page*, some to *yeoman*, or *groom*, or *gentleman of the king's privy chamber*. In this capacity he received a yearly salary of twenty marks, about 240*l.* of our money. It seems to have been at this time, and perhaps even previous to it, that he not only gained the esteem, but the most intimate friendship and confidence of John of Gaunt, then Earl of Richmond, afterwards Duke of Lancaster, the third son of the King. This we must conclude from the contents of three poems written during this period, 'The Book of the Duchess,' 'The Complaint

of the Black Knight,' and 'The Dream of Chaucer.' The Lady Blanche, consort of John of Gaunt, seems likewise to have favoured him with her especial patronage, and it was at her request that he wrote 'La Priere de Notre Dame,' and some other poems. His genius and amiable qualities won for him the affections of all those with whom his situation brought him in contact. The strongest proofs of his intimacy with John of Gaunt, are contained in the poem called 'Chaucer's Dream,' an Epithalamium on the marriage of his friend, in which he gives an allegorical account of the courtship of the Prince with the Lady Blanche, daughter of Henry, duke of Lancaster. From this poem, it would seem to have been partly owing to the exertions of the poet that the lovers were married; an event by which the poet's power and influence was not a little increased. During the time of his appointment as *valettus* he lived near the palace, at Woodstock, in a small house near the park gate; and many local descriptions in his poems, belonging to this period of his life, may be traced to the beautiful scenery around that castle. In the autumn of the year 1359, in which

the marriage of John of Gaunt with the Lady Blanche was celebrated, Edward III. sent out his formidable armada against France, and Chaucer accompanied his friend, the Earl of Richmond, on this expedition. This fact is established by the poet's own evidence, given by him in the year 1386, in the celebrated cause between Sir Richard le Scrope and Sir Robert Grosvenor. But whether he took an active part in that war is very doubtful; for the words which occur in his evidence, "I have borne arms for twenty-seven years," cannot possibly mean that he had been a soldier for that space of time, nor even prove that he had ever been a soldier. For in those times almost all officers, civil as well as military, bore arms as a distinction; and Chaucer, by saying that he had borne arms for twenty-seven years, only meant that he had been in the king's service for that number of years, and was fully qualified to be a witness in such a cause.

The assistance which Chaucer had given the noble lovers was not forgotten. In the retinue of the Lady Blanche was Catherine Rouet, daughter of Sir Payne Pycard de Rouet, a native of Hainault, and king

at arms for that province. This lady, who, from a governess in the Duke of Lancaster's family, after the death of the Duchess in 1369, first became the Duke's mistress, and in the end his legitimate wife, had a sister called Philippa, who won the affections of our poet. The Duchess Blanche, during her lifetime, always advanced the poet's interest with the object of his love ; but the marriage of Chaucer with Philippa, by which he subsequently became allied to the royal family, did not take place till a few months after the death of the Lady Blanche, in 1369, when the poet was forty-one years of age. The cause of this long delay is uncertain, and only matter of conjecture ; but as the marriage took place a few months after the death of the Queen, to whom Philippa was maid of honour, it is not improbable, that her attachment to her royal mistress was greater than the desire to be united with her lover.

After his return from France, and during his courtship, Chaucer translated into English the celebrated French epic, called 'Romaunt of the Rose,' the work of two poets, William de Lorris and John de Meun,

consisting of upwards of 22,000 verses. Chaucer's translation, however, occupies only 7699 verses, containing the part written by de Lorris, by far the greater of the two poets; but even this is a condensation of more than 13,000 verses of the original. In the year in which the Lady Blanche died, Chaucer wrote 'The Book of the Duchess,' which is a eulogy on the virtues and charms of his late patroness.

About the close of the period of which we have been here speaking, the history of Chaucer becomes somewhat more authentic; for, besides the document mentioned above, by virtue of which he received an annual pension of twenty marks, we have another, dated the 20th of June, 1370, from which we learn that he received letters of protection from the king, and was commissioned, in the service of his sovereign, to visit the continent. The object of this mission is unknown, but we have reason to conclude that Chaucer fulfilled it to the satisfaction of his master; for, after the lapse of about two years and a half, in November, 1372, he was again dispatched by the King, with two other envoys, on a commission to

treat with the republic of Genoa, respecting some place on the coast of England, where the Genoese might establish a regularly constituted factory; or, as others think, for the purpose of borrowing ships from the Italian republic.

In the document to which we are indebted for our knowledge of this event, Chaucer is called *scutifer*, or *esquire*. This embassy to Italy is one of the most memorable events in the life of our poet, inasmuch as it brought him into direct communication with one of the noblest minds that Italy has ever produced. We allude to Petrarch. The fact is, indeed, not stated in any historical record, and has been doubted by many who had occasion to mention it, but one of Chaucer's own poems seems to bear evidence in support of it; and the idea of these two great poets meeting face to face suggests so pleasing a picture, and is so pregnant with beautiful associations, that we should very unwillingly refuse our belief in it, even were it founded on still weaker evidence. In the 'Canterbury Tales' we meet with a character called "the Clerk of Oxenford," in whom the poet has been said,

though with only a partial foundation, to pourtray himself; and this personage, in relating the beautiful story of the 'Patient Griselda,' says, that he had

Lerned (it) at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
Francis Petrark.

Petrarch, at that time seventy years old, actually resided in the neighbourhood of Padua, and translated the story of Patient Griselda from the Italian into Latin, in the year 1373, so that Chaucer must have had his interview with the veteran poet, either while he was engaged in translating the story, or shortly after its completion. If we may indulge ourselves in imagining the venerable bard reading his version of the pathetic story to his British guest, who was destined to be the Father of English Poetry, we have a subject worthy of the pencil of the greatest artist.

On the 23rd of April, 1374, soon after his return from Italy, Chaucer, as a reward for his services during his mission, received a grant of a pitcher of wine, to be given to him daily by the King's chief butler. But this was not all; for in June of the same year he was appointed comptroller of the customs of wool

in the port of London. A clause was added in the patent, enjoining Chaucer to perform the duties of his office in person, and to write all accounts with his own hand. This clause, looking at Chaucer as we *now* do, seems little-minded indeed, and almost malicious; but it was probably not ill meant, and, at all events, was cheerfully complied with by the poet.

Although the duties of this office were very foreign to his favourite pursuits, still he did not, in the discharge of the one, neglect the other, and on this, as on all former occasions, showed, that the common duties of ordinary life are by no means incompatible with the lofty occupations in which the poet finds his heaven on earth; for he is said to have fulfilled his official duties with the strictest integrity and punctuality; while, on the other hand, some of his most charming productions—such as ‘The Floure and the Lefe,’ ‘The House of Fame,’ and several minor poems, all of which were written before 1382, show that his intellectual powers, as well as his will, retained their full vigour and freshness. In November, 1375, the King gave him the wardship of the son and heir of Sir Edmund Staplegate, in Kent, for which he received

a remuneration of 104*l.*, equal to 1872*l.* in modern money; and, in the year following, 71*l.* 4*s.* 6*d.*, or in modern money 1262*l.*, which had been forfeited to the crown for non-payment of duties on a quantity of wool, were granted to our poet. These additions to his own property made a considerable improvement in his circumstances; and that he, as a true poet, liberally shared the enjoyment of his riches with his friends, may be inferred from the passage in his 'Testament of Love,' where he says, "I had comfort to be in that plight, that both profit were to me and my friends." During the year 1377 Chaucer was, besides his regular office, employed in some important state business on the continent, and letters were granted to him, which secured him the protection of the King in passing the seas for that purpose. The object of this new mission is not quite demonstrable, but it was probably the same which is recorded in the Chronicle of Froissard, who says, that Chaucer, with two other envoys, Sir Guichard d'Angle and Sir Richard Stan, was sent to France to negotiate about a marriage between Richard, Prince of Wales, afterwards Richard

II., and the daughter of Charles V., King of France. But the only thing gained by this embassy was, a prolongation of a truce which had been violated by the French.

We have for some time lost sight of John of Gaunt, the powerful friend and patron of our poet. After the death of the Black Prince, his elder brother, and heir to the crown of England, he had been led, by his unbounded love of dominion, to marry the daughter of Peter the Cruel, King of Castile, in order thereby to become king of that country. The chief object, however, of his ambition was the crown of England; and, if we may believe the statement of some historians, it was for the attainment of this object that he adopted and patronized the doctrines of Wickliffe; for they suppose, that he, in this case being sure of the support of the reformed party, would have been enabled to crush the clergy, the most powerful party in the kingdom. Chaucer is supposed by some to have co-operated with the Duke, to promote the cause of the reformers. His poems, indeed, abound in censure inflicted upon the licentious and worldly habits of the clergy, but

no proof can be adduced of his having advocated the cause of any particular party, or of his having identified himself with any; and, while his attacks are simply directed against the abuses of the clergy of his age, he, on the other hand, recognises and esteems the good wherever it manifested itself: in fact, he does not attack the system of Roman Catholicism, but merely its abuses and excrescences. And, whatever may have been the views of the Duke of Lancaster, no one has ever ventured to charge Chaucer with having acted from such selfish motives in his attacks on the clergy, as those of the Duke. The aged King Edward III., foreseeing or dreading the disasters which would naturally follow the accession of the Duke of Lancaster to the throne of England, declared his grandson Richard, the son of the Black Prince, heir to the crown, though he was only a boy, and at the time of Edward's death, 1377, not above eleven years old.

The accession of the young King did not produce any alteration in the circumstances of our poet, for immediately after the death of the old King, Chaucer received a renewal of the grant of comptroller of the

customs, and the year following a confirmation of his annual pension of twenty marks, with the addition of twenty more, as a substitute for the pitcher of wine which had hitherto been given to him every day in kind. Four years after the accession of Richard II., in May, 1382, the year in which the young King celebrated his nuptials with Ann of Bohemia, Chaucer, in addition to his former appointment, obtained the office of comptroller of the small customs, and the young Queen, very soon after her marriage, seems to have patronised our poet, and is even said to have suggested to him the subject of a new poem, 'The Legende of Goode Women,' in which he was requested to make amends for his former invectives against the fair sex. He endeavoured to gratify the desire of his royal lady, but at the same time satisfied his own feelings by occasional touches of humourous irony. This work bears internal evidence of its unfinished condition, for only ten women are set forth as examples of female virtue, while the poet himself states that he intended to commemorate nineteen.

About the second year of Richard II., Chaucer, not-

withstanding his rich income, seems to have been in some pecuniary difficulties; for among the records in the Tower we find one stating that the king took Chaucer and his lands under his protection: the cause of this is entirely unknown, and has given rise to some absurd conjectures. But fortune, who had hitherto favoured our poet in all he undertook, and had heaped upon him all the advantages which wealth and high connections can afford, now began for a time to forsake him; and a period of adversity and sorrows followed, arising out of the religious disturbances and the conflicts between the Wickliffites and the adherents of the old Church. The Duke of Lancaster, who before had been the great patron of the party of the reformers, had indeed relaxed in his zeal when he saw the outrageous means by which some fanatic followers of Wickliffe attempted to promote the cause of reform; but he, as well as his friend Chaucer, though without identifying themselves with the Wickliffites, did not hesitate to advance their interests whenever they thought it beneficial to their country. This conduct exasperated the clergy, and a plot was formed which

not only destroyed the influence of the Duke, but even endangered his life. The Duke escaped ; but his adversaries, ever watchful, never neglected an opportunity of injuring him. In one of these contests the life of Chaucer was endangered, and he only saved himself by seeking shelter in a foreign land. In the year 1384 two men, Sir Nicholas Brember, and John of Northampton, were brought forward as candidates to the mayorship of the city of London. The former was supported by the government, the latter, a man of great integrity, and a declared friend of the Wickliffites, by the popular party. When the contest grew hot, and the people broke out in open rebellion, Chaucer joined the party of Northampton. But the insurrection was soon suppressed ; John of Northampton was taken into custody, and an active search was made after his confederates. Chaucer, in fear of being likewise imprisoned, and of being compelled to betray those of his friends who had taken a prominent part in the riot, fled from England.

Chaucer, the greatest ornament of his country at this time, now wandered about homeless in a foreign

land. Many of his friends, who had likewise committed themselves in the insurrection, accompanied the poet, who, as long as his reduced means admitted, generously supported them, and concealed them, as he himself says, longer than for his own personal safety he should have done. It is not clear whether he was accompanied by his wife in his exile, and we may therefore reasonably conclude that she was not living, because, from their well-known attachment to each other, it is not likely she would have left him at a time when her tenderness was more than ever necessary to render his life endurable. We have no record that his sons, Thomas, then about thirteen years of age, and Lewis, only in his fourth year, accompanied their father. Chaucer seems at first to have taken up his abode in Hainault, but after a short stay there, he retired to the Dutch province of Zealand. His former friends in England in the meanwhile behaved to him in the basest manner. They not only made their peace with the government without any stipulation in favour of the poet, who had sacrificed all that was dear to him in their cause, but, although they

had undertaken to manage his pecuniary affairs at home, and to remit him funds for his support, they suddenly cut off all his supplies, and, hoping that he would never return, possessed themselves of his property. It is, however, probable that he had not altogether lost his favour with the government, for during the whole time of his exile the office of comptroller was not taken from him, but filled by deputy; and it seems to have been the idea that he had no longer to dread any persecution, which induced him towards the end of the year 1386, after an absence of eighteen months, to return to his native country. That he was in England in the October of this year, is apparent from the above-mentioned evidence which he gave in the cause of Sir Richard le Scrope and Sir John Grosvenor. But soon after his return he was arrested by orders of the ministers of Richard II., and imprisoned in the Tower. This confinement, however, does not seem to have been so much the wish of the King, as of Thomas of Woodstock, who at that time had almost all the power of the government in his own hands. Chaucer was submitted to a severe

examination, not for the purpose of gaining information respecting the part which he himself had acted during the insurrection, but with the design to extort from him some confession respecting his former friends and associates. But Chaucer, evading all attempts made with this view, continued in his confinement; and his circumstances gradually became so reduced, that in May 1388 he applied for a patent to dispose of the two pensions of twenty marks each, which were all that now remained to him of the bounty of the King, and were now sacrificed to supply the more immediate wants of himself and his family. The common account of what now followed is this:—As his distress was daily increasing, and he saw no chance of being released, except by making a full disclosure of all he knew, and by impeaching his former associates, he at length, after an imprisonment of nearly two years, made up his mind to do so, and no longer to suffer merely for the purpose of sparing those who, ever since the day when calamities broke in upon him, had abandoned him with the basest ingratitude, and had even showed a desire to sacrifice his life in order

to enrich themselves. For nearly four years Chaucer had suffered patiently, while his associates, far from endeavouring to mitigate his distress, did every thing to increase it. We would ask those who believe in the truth of this account, and who consider it as a blemish in his character, whether it would be reasonable to expect that Chaucer should have continued to sacrifice his own happiness, and that of his family, merely for the purpose of protecting those faithless traitors? It is indeed not difficult for a moralist to lay down general rules of conduct, but he too often forgets to take into account the real character of human nature, and to consider that a thousand circumstances may render an action, in itself blameable, if looked upon in the abstract, not only excusable, but even justifiable, because it has become a matter of physical necessity. In the case of Chaucer it might moreover be asked, whether he actually and materially injured the parties whom he impeached? Here history is silent, and the whole transaction has in fact not been thought by any of his contemporaneous historians to deserve notice. All we know of it is derived from

Chaucer himself, who, in his 'Testament of Love,' excuses his conduct, and states that it brought upon him the charge of falsehood, and oppressed him with severe obloquy and censure. But we have also to remember another circumstance which has been overlooked by his biographers. When Chaucer was induced to disclose the secrets of his party, he must have known that it could not be the intention of the government to institute a fresh persecution against those who, as we have seen above, had made their peace with the government during his exile in Zealand, and who must consequently have been known to the government, but that it was simply the intention of the ministers to ascertain some latent causes which had led to the insurrection. The whole affair, however, is surrounded by doubtfulness, and the assumed investigation of an occurrence which had long before been peacefully settled, bears strong marks of improbability.

The 'Testament of Love,' a prose dialogue, to which we alluded above, was partly written during his imprisonment in the Tower, and partly after he had obtained his liberty, but it was not given out until

1393. It is an imitation of Boethius '*De Consolatione Philosophiæ*,' with this characteristic difference, that, in the work of Chaucer, he makes Love act the part which in Boethius is assigned to Philosophy. It gives us a moving picture of the poet's sufferings, but at the same time displays the unconquerable power and energy of his mind, the harmony and tranquillity of which no outward circumstances were able to disturb. During the whole period that Chaucer was suffering in the manner above described, the Duke of Lancaster was absent from England, and Thomas of Woodstock, who had usurped all political authority, was almost sole lord and master. But in May 1389 the King cast off the shackles in which he had been held by this minister, and this act was almost immediately followed by the appointment of Chaucer as Clerk of the works at Westminster, with a salary of two shillings per day. The year after he received another office of a similar nature at Windsor, the duties of which he was allowed to transfer to a deputy. It would seem that he was indebted for these new marks of the royal favour to the patronage of the Queen Ann.

But the poet did not retain these offices for any length of time, for in September 1391 we find them in the possession of another person. There is also a tradition, that about this time he retired to his former residence at Woodstock, which had been given to him by Edward III., or his Queen. The motive of this retirement is only matter of conjecture, but it is not improbable that the Duke of Lancaster, who about this period returned from Castile with immense treasures, and who soon regained his influence at court, should have enabled the poet, now in his sixty-third year, to resign his offices, and enjoy the remaining years of his life in undisturbed retirement.

The first work which here seems to have engaged his leisure, was an elementary treatise on astronomy, called 'Conclusions of the Astrolabie,' which he wrote for and addressed to his son Lewis, then ten years of age. This work bears the date of the 12th of March, 1391, and is composed according to the latitude of Oxford. But the active mind of our poet did not stop here, and it is as if after having escaped from the turmoil of the world, he had only now, though at the

advanced age of sixty-three, been enabled to unfold the inexhaustible treasures of his genius. For it is during this period of retirement that he wrote his noblest poetical work, which is the basis of his reputation as a great poet, and which, like the Homeric poems, will be an everlasting source of enjoyment to mankind ;— we mean the ‘*Canterbury Tales*,’ a work surpassing in freshness, vigour, masterly painting of characters, and graphic descriptions, all that he had ever written. In 1394, a few years after he commenced this immortal poem, Chaucer received the grant of an annual pension of 20*l.*, or about 360*l.* in modern money. This seems to have been given to him either through the influence of the Duke of Lancaster, or of his “good Queen Ann,” for the purpose of enabling the venerable bard to complete his great undertaking in ease and comfort. In the same year two events occurred which were of much importance to our poet. His patroness, Queen Ann, died, and about the same time Constance, Duchess of Lancaster. This last occurrence led, two years afterwards, to the marriage of the Duke of Lancaster with Catherine Swinford, the

sister of Chaucer's wife, with whom the Duke had long been connected, and who had borne him three children. It is probably owing to this new connection with the royal family that Richard II. renewed the annual grant of twenty marks which Chaucer had received from Edward III., and of which he had been obliged to dispose during his imprisonment. In 1398 we also find that he received the grant of a pipe of wine, to be given to him every year by the King's chief butler, an office which some time after was held by Chaucer's own son Thomas, who had married Matilda, the daughter of Sir John Burghershe, and one of the richest heiresses of the time. Not long after the marriage of the Duke of Lancaster we find Chaucer in possession of the castle and park of Donnington, in Berkshire. By what means he obtained this estate is differently stated. Godwin says it was the gift of his friend and brother-in-law, while others say that there is a record in the Cottonian library, according to which he bought this then magnificent estate. Another record, dated May 4th, 1398, renders the question somewhat less perplexing, inasmuch as we learn from it that Chaucer obtained from the King

“a protection for a term of two years against all interruption from arrests and prosecutions.” This is scarcely to be accounted for on the supposition that Donnington castle was presented to him, whereas in the other case it may not seem improbable that by purchasing this estate he had drained his purse so as to be, at least for the first two or three years, actually in want of such a grant of protection. In the park of this castle, of which some ruins are still extant, there was an oak which, down to the time of Queen Elizabeth, was generally known by the name of “Chaucer’s oak.” Tradition says that the poet himself had planted it, and that he had written several of his later poems beneath its shading boughs. Another tradition mentions three oaks as connected with the memory of the Father of English Poetry; one of them was said to have been named by him “the King’s oak,” the second, “the Queen’s oak,” and the third, “Chaucer’s oak.”

On the third of February, 1399, the Duke of Lancaster died, and with him sank into the grave the chief support of our poet. This melancholy event was soon followed by the deposition of Richard II., and

the elevation of Henry IV., the son of John of Gaunt. These events seem to have broken the spirit of the aged poet; for although Henry IV., a few months after his accession, confirmed all the grants that had been made to Chaucer by his predecessor, with an addition of an annuity of forty marks, and appointed his son Thomas as chief butler, still the heart of the poet had received a shock, and, towards the close of the year, he resolved to leave the places so full of happy and sad associations, and to close his days in the city where he was born. With this intention, and at the same time to arrange some of his affairs, he went to London. We have a record, still extant in the office of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, from which we see, that, on the 24th of November, 1399, Chaucer took a lease for fifty-three years from the abbot, prior, and convent of Westminster, of a house situate in the garden of their chapel. The site of this house is supposed to have been the place which is now occupied by the Chapel of Henry VII. But Chaucer had not long inhabited this spot, in which he hoped to pass the remainder of his old age in the peaceful occupations of literature, before he reached

his destiny. He died on the 25th of November, 1400, in the seventy-second year of his age. His physical strength was broken, but his mind retained its peculiar energy to the last, and even on his death-bed he is said to have written the manly and pathetic ballad entitled, 'Goode Counsaile of Chaucer.'

For the well-known portrait of Chaucer we are indebted to an old MS. of the *Canterbury Tales*, belonging to the fifteenth century, which is at present in the possession of the Marquis of Stafford. This MS., at the commencement of the tale of *Melibœus*, represents the poet riding on horseback, in a vest or gipon of dark velvet, with a bonnet of the same colour, with gilt anlace, or dagger, black boots, and with the trappings of his horse partially gilt. In the part of the tale of *Melibœus* in which the poet portrays himself, he hints that he was rather corpulent, and was in the habit of looking down on the ground. He also gives a similar portrait of himself in the Prologue to the '*Rime of Sire Thopas*.' But, notwithstanding this tendency to be corpulent, his appearance conveys the impression of great delicacy. He seems to have been short of stature. His countenance, calm

and composed as it was, appears to have been expressive of a high degree of naïve humour.

The character and temperament of Chaucer are clearly and beautifully set forth in his own works. He was cheerful, kind, open and serene to the last moments of his life, and gained the affections of all with whom he came in contact ; his social habits were formed by the various circumstances and spheres in which he had lived and moved. He was naturally social, and even convivial, and, like many other poets, he paid little regard to his financial means ; hence we find him involved in difficulties at times, when, considering his ample income, we should have least expected it. But, notwithstanding this carelessness about his own affairs, Chaucer was, in the highest degree, strict and punctual in the performance of all his official duties.

Chaucer was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the aisle which is now called the "Poets' Corner." The original inscription on his grave, which does not seem to have been adorned by any particular monument, ran thus:—

*GALFRIDUS CHAUCER VATES ET FAMA POESIS
MATERNÆ HAC SACRA SUM TUMULATUS HUMO.*

A monument was afterwards erected by Caxton, which, however, in 1556 made room for another, erected by Nicholas Brigham, of Oxford, an intense admirer of our poet. This monument is still seen in the place where it was erected, and bears the now almost obliterated inscription :

*QUI FUIT ANGLORUM VATES TER MAXIMUS OLIM
GALFRIDUS CHAUCER CONDITUR HOC TUMULO:
ANNUM SI QUÆRAS DOMINI, SI TEMPORA VITÆ,
ECCE NOTÆ SUBSUNT, QUÆ TIBI CUNCTA NOTANT.
ANNO DOMINI 1400, DIE MENSIS OCTOB. 25.
ERUMNARUM REQUIES MORS.*

N. BRIGHAM HOS FECIT MUSARUM NOMINE SUMPTUS.

1556.

Great Poet ! neither the obliteration of the monumental tribute to thy honour, nor the ages that have rolled over thy quiet ashes, can ever erase one letter from the bead-roll of thy fame, or cover with the desert sand of time the records of thy spirit which thou thyself hast left us.

EULOGIES OF CHAUCER,

BY

HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND OTHERS.

JOHN GOWER;
DE CONFESSIOE AMANTIS.

VENUS *thus speaks to GOWER.*

“GRETE well CHAUCER, when ye meet,
As my disciple and my Poéte,
For in the floweres of his youth
(By various ways he could, in sooth,)
With ditties, and with songés glade,
The which he for my sake ymade,
The land ful-filled is, over all.
Whereof, to him in speciáll,
Above all others I am most holde.

“Therefore, now in his dayés olde
Thou shalt to him tell this messáge,
That he, upon his later age,
To set an end to all his werke,
As he which is mine owén clerke,
Do make his *Testament of Love*,
As thou hast done thy shrift above !

*Printed in 1554. Fol. cxc *.*

* A few words are translated or transposed, and the spelling is a little modernized, in the Eulogies by Chaucer's contemporaries.—ED.

JOHN LYDGATE, THE MONK OF BURY,
IN HIS PROLOGUE TO THE STORY OF THEBES.

(Alluding to the Canterbury Tales.)

FLOWER of Poets, throughout all Britáin !
Which, truth to tell, had most of excellence
In rhetorick and eke in eloquence ;
Read ye his rhymes who list the truth to find,
Which never shall grow pale within my mind,
But always fresh be in mine memory.
To whom be given honour, praise, and glory,
Of seeing first the light in our languáge ;
Chief Registrer of this goode Pilgrimage ;
All that was told forgetting nought at all,—
Feign'd tales, nor things historial,
With many proverbs, diverse and uncouth,
By the rehearsal of his sugared mouth :
Of eche thing keeping in substance
The sentence whole, withouten variance,
Voiding the chaff, sooth to speak plain—
Enlumining the true, picked, solid grain.

JOHN LYDGATE,
IN THE PROLOGUE TO HIS TRANSLATION OF BOC-
CACE, ON THE FALL OF PRINCES.

MY maister CHAUCER, with his fresh Comedies
Is dead, alas ! chief Poet of Britaine,
That whilom made full piteous Tragedies :
The fall of Princes he did also 'plaine,
As he that was of rhyming sovereign,
Whom all this land should of good right prefer,
Since of our Language he was the Load-star !

And, in like wise, as I have told before,
My maister CHAUCER did his busyness,
And in his dayes he hath so well him borne
Out of our tongue to banish all rudenessse
And to reform with colours of swetenésse :
Wherefore to him let us give laud and glory,
And put his name with Poets in memory.

This said Poete, my Maister, in his dayes
Made and compiled full many a fresh dittee,
Ballads, Complaints, Roundels, and Virélays,
Full delectable to heren and to see :
For which, men should—of right and equitie,
Since he of English in rhyming was the best—
Pray unto God to give his soule good rest.

OCCLEVE,
IN THE PROLOGUE TO HIS BOOK,
DE REGIMINE PRINCIPIIIS.

BUT welaway ! so is mine hearté woe
That the honour of English tongue is dead,
Of whom I counsel had, and help in need.

O, Master deare ! and father reverent,
My master CHAUCER, flower of eloquence !
Mirroure of fruitful wisdom and intent,
O, universal father in sciéce,
Alas ! that thou thine excellenté prudéce,
In thy bed mortal, mightest not bequeath !
What ailéd Death ?—Alas ! why take *thy* breath ?

O, Death ! that didest no single evil here
In slaughtre of him—for all the land it smarteth :
But ne'etheless yet haddest thou no powere
His name to slay ! His virtue high asserteth
Its right, unslain—(though death this life aye hurteth)
With bookés of his enórinate enditing,
Which are to all this land enlumining.

EDMUND SPENSER

IN HIS FAIRY QUEEN.—L. 4. CANTO 2. ST. 31, &c.

Courageous Cambel, and stout Triamond
With Canace and Cambine link'd in lovely bond.

XXXI.

WHILOM as antique stories tellen us,
Those two were foes the fellonest on ground,
And battle made, the draddest dangerous,
That ever shrilling trumpet did resound :
Though now their acts be nowhere to be found,
As that renowned poet them compil'd
With warlike numbers, and heroick sound,
Dan CHAUCER (well of English undefiled)
On Fame's eternal bead-roll worthy to be filed.

XXXII.

But wicked Time, that all good thoughts doth waste,
And works of noblest wits to nought out-wear,
That famous Monument hath quite defaced
And robb'd the world of treasure endless dear,
The which might have enrichéd all us here.
O cursed Eld ! the canker-worm of wits ;
How may these rhymes (so rude as doth appear)
Hope to endure, sith works of heavenly wits
Are quite devour'd, and brought to nought by little bits.

XXXIII.

Then pardon, O most sacred happy spirit,
That I thy labours lost may thus revive,
And steal from thee the meed of thy due merit,
That none durst ever while thou wast alive ;
And being dead, in vain yet many strive :
Ne dare I like, but through infusion sweet
Of thine own spirit (which doth in me survive)
I follow here the footing of thy feet,
That with thy meaning so I may the rather meet.

DENHAM.

ON MR. ABRAHAM COWLEY,

IN HIS WORKS, PRINTED 1709. p. 84.

OLD CHAUCER, like the morning star,
To us discovers day from far,
His light those mists and clouds dissolv'd,
Which our dark nation long involv'd ;
But he descending to the shades,
Darkness again the age invades.
Next (like Aurora) Spenser rose,
Whose purple blush the day foreshows.

MILTON,

IN HIS IL PENSEROSO.

BUT, O sad Virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musæus from his bower,
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing—
Or call up Him that left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold, &c.

AKENSIDE,

FOR A STATUE OF CHAUCER AT WOODSTOCK.

SUCH was old CHAUCER, such the placid mien
Of him who first with harmony inform'd
The language of our fathers. Here he dwelt
For many a cheerful day. These ancient walls
Have often heard him while his legends blithe
He sang of love and knighthood, or the wiles
Of homely life, thro' each estate and age,
The fashions and the follies of the world
With cunning hand pourtraying. Tho' perchance
From Blenheim's tow'rs, O stranger ! thou art come,
Glowing with Churchill's trophies, yet in vain
Dost thou applaud them, if thy breast be cold
To him this other Hero, who, in times
Dark and untaught, began with charming verse
To tame the rudeness of his native land.

SONNET TO CHAUCER.

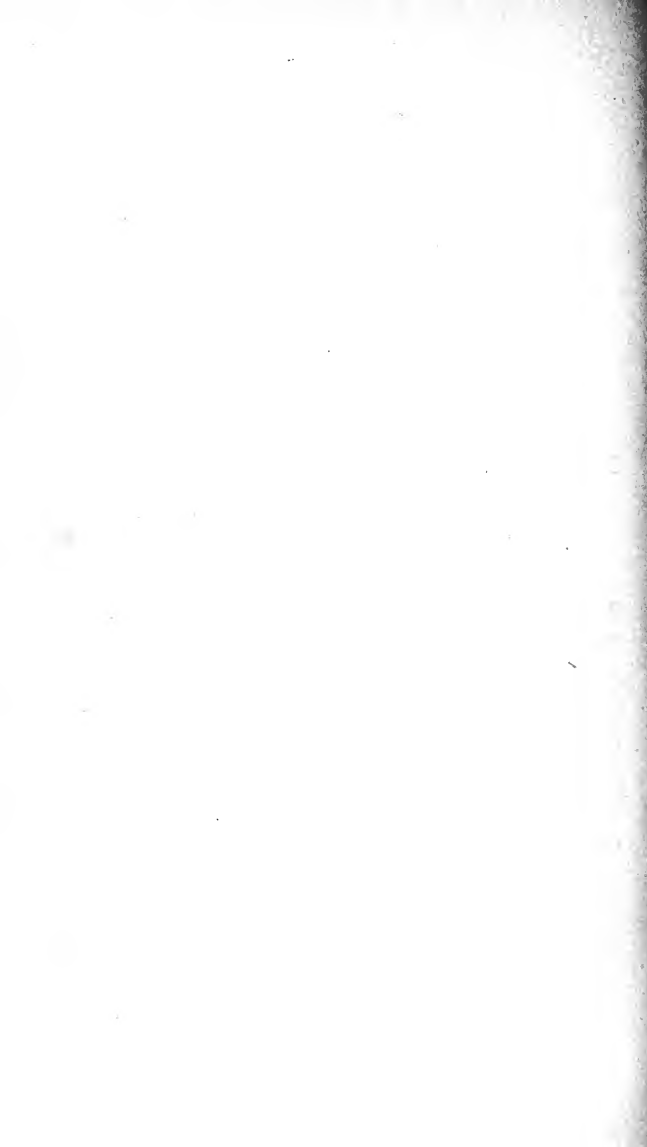
ENGLISH CHAUCER ! oft to thy glory old—
Thy sire-ship in poesy, thy fame,
Dull'd not by dusty Time (which aye will hold
Thy name up, banner high, bright as a flame
That burns on holy altar)—have my ears,
Like portals, wide been openéd. Great fears
And worldly cares were on me ; but a hand,
Power-fraught with this rich gift, hath gently fann'd
My sorrow'd spirit to a ripe zeal fine.
Now gaze I like young Bacchus on his wine,
And own no check from sorrow's hollow frown,
Full-hearted that the wrestler is down ;
Strong as an eagle gone up to the sun,
Dull earth I quit, and stray with CHAUCER on !

C. W. 1823.

ERRATA.

- Page 4, line 22—for “as we did advise,” read *as I you apprise*.
 — 22, — 17—for “shone right moist,” read *shoes right fair, &c.*
 — 44, — 13—for “of sorrow’s woe,” read *of sorrow, woe, &c.*
 — 53, — 2—for “Land,” read *Luna*.
 — 62, — 9—for “be gaoler at that tide,” read *the gaoler at that tide, &c.*
 — 78, — 7—for “This will I say, that were he born my brother,” read
 And this will say (e’en tho’ he were my brother).
 — 78, — 8—for “I’d pray to heaven never to have another,” read
 He’s faithful—only till he get another.
 — 139, — 1—for “at this right foolish case,” read *their fill at this nice*
 case.
 — 139, — 2—for “credulous,” read *dexterous*.

THE PROLOGUE
TO
THE CANTERBURY TALES;
MODERNIZED
BY R. H. HORNE.



PROLOGUE

TO

THE CANTERBURY TALES.

WHEN that sweet April showers with downward shoot
The drought of March have pierc'd unto the root,
And bathéd every vein with liquid power,
Whose virtue rare engendereth the flower ;
When Zephyrus also with his fragrant breath
Inspiréd hath in every grove and heath
The tender shoots of green, and the young sun
Hath in the Ram one half his journey run,
And small birds in the trees make melody,
That sleep and dream all night with open eye ;
So nature stirs all energies and ages
That folks are bent to go on pilgrimages,

And palmers for to wander thro' strange strands,
To sing the holy mass in sundry lands :
And more especially, from each shire's end
Of England, they to Canterbury wend,
The holy blissful martyr for to seek,
Who hath upheld them when that they were weak.

It fell, within that season on a day
In Southwark, at the Tabard as I lay,
Ready to wend upon my pilgrim route
To Canterbury, with a heart devout,
At night was come into that hostelry
Well nine-and-twenty in a company,
Of sundry folk who thus had chanced to fall
In fellowship, and pilgrims were they all,
That now to Canterbury town would ride.
The chambers and the stables they were wide,
And all of us refresh'd, and of the best.

And shortly when the sun was gone to rest,
So had I spoken with them every one,
That I was of their fellowship anon,
And made them promise early for to rise
To take our way there, as we did advise.
But ne'ertheless, while I have time and space,
Ere that I further in this story pace,
Methinks it were accordant with good sense

To tell you the condition and pretence
Of each of them, so as it seem'd to me ;
And which they were—of what kind, and degree ;
And eke in what array that they were in :
And at a knight, then, will I first begin.

A KNIGHT there was, and that a worthy man,
Who from the hour on which he first began
To ride out, vowed himself to chivalry,
Honour and truth, freedom and courtesy.
In his lord's war right worthy had he shone,
And thereto ridden—none had further gone,
In Christian, and in Heathen land, no less ;
And ever honour'd for his worthiness.

At Alexandria was he when 'twas won.
Full oft the wassail board he had begun,
Above the bravest warriors out of Prusse ;
In Lithuania had he serv'd, and Russe ;
No Christian man so oft of his degree.
At Algeziras, in Granada, he
Had join'd the siege ; and ridden in Belmarie :
At Layas was he, and at Satalie
When they were won ; and, borne on the Great Sea,
At many a noble fight of ships was he.
In mortal battles had he been fifteen,

And fought for our true faith, at Tramissene,
In the lists thrice—and always slain his foe.
And this same worthy Knight had been also
In Anatolia sometime with a lord,
Fighting against the foes of God his word ;
And evermore he won a sovereign prize.
Though thus at all times honour'd, he was wise,
And of his port as meek as is a maid.
He never yet a word discourteous said
In all his life to any mortal wight :
He was a very perfect gentle knight.

But for to tell you of his staid array,—
His horse was good, albeit he was not gay.
He wore a fustian cassock, short and plain,
All smutch'd with rust from coat of mail, and rain.
For he was late return'd ; and he was sage,
And cared for nought but his good pilgrimage.

His son, a young SQUIRE, with him there I saw ;
A lover and a lusty bachelor ;
With locks crisp curl'd, as they'd been laid in press :
Of twenty years of age he was, I guess.
He was in stature of the common length,
With wondrous nimbleness, and great of strength :
And he had been in expeditions three,

In Flanders, Artois, and in Picardy;
And borne him well, tho' in so little space,
In hope to stand fair in his lady's grace.

Embroider'd was he, as it were a mead
All crowded with fresh flowers, white and red.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day :
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, with sleeves right long and wide
Well could he sit his horse, and fairly ride.
He could make songs, and letters well endite,
Joust and eke dance, and portraits paint, and write.
His amorous ditties nightly fill'd the vale ;
He slept no more than doth the nightingale.

Courteous he was, modest and serviceable,
And carv'd before his father at the table.

A YEOMAN had he ; and no page beside :
It pleased him, on this journey, thus to ride ;
And he was clad in coat and hood of green.
A sheaf of peacock arrows, bright and keen,
Under his belt he bare full thriftily :
Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly ;
His arrows droopéd not with feathers low ;
And in his hand he bare a mighty bow.
His head was like a nut, with visage brown.

Of wood-craft all the ways to him were known.
An arm-brace wore he that was rich and broad,
And by his side a buckler and a sword ;
While on the other side a dagger rare
Well sheathed was hung, and on his breast he bare
A large St. Christopher of silver sheen.
A horn he had ; the baldric was of green.
A forester was he truly, as I guess.

There was, likewise, a Nun, a PRIORESS,
That of her smiling was full simple and coy.
Her greatest oath was but ‘ by Saint Eloy ;’
And she was naméd Madam Eglentine.
Right well she sang the services divine,
Entunéd in her nose with accent sweet ;
And French she spake full properly and neat,
After the school of Stratford, at Bow town,
For French of Paris was to her unknown.
At table she was scrupulous withal ;
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor in her sauce would dip her fingers deep.
Well could she carry a morsel, and well keep,
That not a drop e’er fell upon her breast.
In courtesy her pleasure much did rest.
Her dainty upper-lip she wiped so clean

That in her cup there was no farthing seen
Of grease, when she had drunk ; and for her meat
Full seemly bent she forward on her seat.
And of a truth she was of great disport ;
Pleasant to all and amiable of port.
It gave her pain to counterfeit the ways
Of court ; its stately manner and displays ;
And to be held in distant reverence.

But for to tell you of her conscience,
She was so tender and so piteous,
She would shed tears if that she saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were hurt or dead.
She had some small hounds, which she always fed
With roasted meat, and milk, and fine wheat bread ;
But sore wept she if one of them were dead,
Or if men with a stick e'er struck it smart :
And all was conscience and tender heart.

Full seemly was her kerchief crimp'd across ;
Her nose well cut and long ; eyes grey as glass ;
Her mouth was small, and thereto soft and red,
And certainly a forehead fair she had :
It was almost a span in breadth, I trow ;
And truly she was not of stature low.

Most proper was her cloak, as I was ware.
Of coral small about her arm she bare

Two strings of beads, bedizen'd all with green,
And thereon hung a broach of gold full sheen,
On which was graven first a crownéd A,
And after "*Amor vincit omnia.*"

Another Nun, also, with her had she—
Who served instead of chaplain—and Priests three.

A Monk there was, of skill and mastery proved ;
A bold hand at a leap, who hunting loved :
A manly man, to be an abbot able.
Full many a dainty horse had he in stable,
And when he rode, men might his bridle hear,
Gingling in a whistling wind as clear
And eke as loud, as doth the chapel bell
Where reign'd he lord o'er many a holy cell.

The rules of Saint Maure and Saint Benedict,
Because that they were old and something strict,
This sturdy monk let old things backward pace,
And of the new world follow'd close the trace.
He rated not the text at a pluck'd hen,
Which saith that hunting 'fits not holy men,
Or that a monk beyond his bricks and mortar
Is like a fish without a drop of water—
That is to say, a monk out of his cloister :—
Now this same text he held not worth an oyster !

And I say his opinion was not bad.
Why should he study and make himself half mad
Upon a book in cloister ever to pore,
Or labour with his hands, and dig and bore
As Austin bids? How shall the world be served?
Let the world's work for Austin be reserved.
Therefore our monk spurr'd on, a jolly wight.
Greyhounds he kept, as swift as bird of flight:
In riding hard and hunting for the hare,
Was all his joy; for no cost would he spare.

I saw his large sleeves trimm'd above the hand
With fur, and that the finest of the land;
And for to keep his hood beneath his chin,
He had of beaten gold a curious pin:
A love-knot at the greater end there was.
His head was bald, and shone like any glass;
And eke his face, as it had been anoint.
He was a lord full fat, and in good point.
His eyes were deep and rolling in his head,
Which steam'd as doth a furnace melting lead.
His boots were supple, his horse right proud to see;
Now certainly a prelate fair was he:
He was not pale as a poor pining ghost.
A fat swan loved he best of any roast.
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

A FRIAR there was, a wanton and a merry ;
Licensed to beg, a wondrous solemn man.
In all the orders four there's none that can
So much of dalliance wrap in language fair.
Full many a marriage had he brought to bear
For women young, and paid the cost with sport.
Unto his order he was rare support.
Right well beloved, in fellowship was he
With jolly franklins all, and yeomanry ;
And eke with women, of each town the flower,
For in confession he possess'd a power
More than a curate, as himself could state,
Being of his order a licentiate.
Full sweetly would he hear confession made ;
Pleasantly was his absolution said.
He was an easy man in penance naming,
And knew that alms fell heavy from light blaming ;
Since to an order poor when much is given,
It proves the culprit has been rightly shriven ;
For if a sinner pay dear for his bent,
He knew the man must certainly repent ;
And many a man so hard is of his heart,
He will not weep, although his soul should smart ;
Therefore, instead of prayers and groans and tears,
Men must give money to the poor fryères.

His tippet always was stuff'd full of knives,
And pins, as presents meant for handsome wives.
And certainly his note was blithe and gay;
Well could he sing, and on the psaltery play.
In songs and tales the prize o'er all bore he.
His neck was white as is the fleur de lis.
Strong was he also, as a champion,
And knew the taverns well in every town,
And every ostler there, and tapster gay,
Much more than he knew beggars by the way.
For unto such a worthy man as he,
Nothing is gain'd from his good faculty
By giving to such lazars countenance :
It is not right—no interest can advance—
To deal with knaves and scrubs who have so little ;
But all with rich, and those who sell good victual.

Therefore 'bove all where profit might arise,
Courteous he was, and full of service wise.
There was no man one half so virtuous :
He was the cleverest beggar in all his house ;
And farm'd a certain district, as in grant.
None of his brethren came within his haunt.
And though a widow scarcely had a shoe,
So pleasant was his "*In principio*,"
He still would have a farthing ere he went.

His harvest was far better than his rent.
And rage he could, as it had been a whelp,
In love-days * ; yet he often gave great help :
For there was he, not like a cloisterer froze,
With threadbare cape, as suits a scholar poor,
But he was like a bishop or a pope.
Of double worsted was his semi-cope,
Round as a new bell from the moulder's press.
Somewhat he lispéd for his wantonness,
To make his English sweet upon his tongue.
And in his harping, when that he had sung,
His eyes they twinkled in his head aright,
As do the stars upon a frosty night.
And Hubert was this worthy friar's name.

Next him, with forked beard, a MERCHANT came,
In motley dress, and high on horse he sat.
He wore a stately Flanders' beaver hat.
His boots, that fitted close, were of neat make ;
His reasons very solemnly he spake,
Sounding the increase of his gains alwáy.
He wish'd the channel had no dues to pay,
Running 'twixt Middleburgh and Overwell.

* Days which were appointed for the settlement of disputes in the most loving manner.—*Bracton*, l. v. fol. 369.

Well could he French crowns by exchanges sell.
All chances he with his shrewd wits beset,
And no one knew that he was much in debt :
So steadily he govern'd all his moves,
With bargains, and with bills that work'd in grooves.
In truth he was a worthy man withal,
But sooth to say, his name I can't recall.

A CLERK there was, from Oxford, in the press,
Who in pure logic placed his happiness.
His horse was lean as any garden rake ;
And he was not right fat, I undertake ;
But hollow look'd, and sober, and ill fed.
His uppermost short cloak was a bare thread,
For he had got no benefice as yet,
Nor for a worldly office was he fit.
For he had rather have at his bed's head
Some twenty volumes, clothed in black or red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophy,
Than richest robes, fiddle, or psaltery.
But though a true philosopher was he,
Yet had he little gold beneath his key ;
But every farthing that his friends e'er lent,
In books and learning was it always spent ;
And busily he pray'd for the sweet souls

Of those who gave him wherewith for the schools.
He bent on study his chief care and heed.
Not a word spake he more than there was need,
And this was said with form and gravest stress,
And short and quick, full of sententiousness.
Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

A SERJEANT of the LAW, wise, wary, arch,
Who oft had gossip'd long in the church porch,
Was also there, full rich of excellence.
Discreet he was and of great reverence ;
For such he seem'd, his words were all so wise.
Justice he was full often in assize ;
By patent and commission from the crown,
For his keen science and his high renown.
Of fees and robes he many had I ween :
So great a purchaser was nowhere seen.
All was fee simple to him, in effect ;
His rightful gainings no one could suspect.
So busy a man as he no circuit has ;
And yet he seeméd busier than he was.
He had at tip of tongue all cases plain,
With all the judgments, since King William's reign.
He likewise could indite such perfect law,

None in his parchments could pinch out a flaw :
And every statute he knew well by rote.
He rode but homely in a medley coat,
With band of twill'd silk round the loins made fast :
On his array no more time shall I waste.

A FRANKLIN* in this company appear'd :
White as a daisy was this Franklin's beard.
With sanguine hues did his complexion shine.
Well loved he in the morn a sop in wine.
His days he gave to pleasure, every one ;
For he was Epicurus's own son,
Who held the opinion that a life of bliss
Was verily man's perfect happiness.

An householder of great extent was he ;
He was St. Julian† in his own countréy.
With bread and ale his board was always crown'd ;
A better cellar no where could be found.
His pantry never was without baked meat,
And fish and flesh, so plenteous and complete,
It snow'd within his house of meat and drink.
Of all the dainties that a man could think,

* A large Freeholder, and wealthy country gentleman.

† "St. Julian was eminent for providing his votaries with good lodgings and accommodations of all sorts."—*Tyrwhitt*.

After the sundry seasons of the year,
His meats thus changed he, and his supper cheer.
Full many a partridge fat had he in mew,
And many a bream and many a jack in stew.
Woe to his cook, unless his sauces were
Made piquant rich, and ready all his gear.
His table with repletion heavy lay
Amidst his hall, throughout the feast-long day.

At sessions there was he both lord and sire.
Full often time he had been Knight o' the Shire.
A dagger, and a purse of netted silk,
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
Sheriff—comptroller—magistrate he'd been ;
A worthier franklin there was nowhere seen.

A HABERDASHER, and a CARPENTER,
A WEAVER, DYER, TAPSTER, eke were here ;
All in the self-same livery attired,
And with a grave fraternity inspired.
Right fresh and new their spruce appearance was :
Their knives were not trickt out with common brass,
But all with silver neatly overwrought ;
Their girdles and their pouches eke, methought.
Each seem'd a worthy burgess, fit and fair
To sit in the guild hall on high-floor'd chair ;

And for the wisdom that his brain could plan
Was well cut out to be an alderman.
Enough for this they had of kine and rent,
And very gladly would their wives assent,
Or else they were to blame, I swear by Adam :
'Tis a fine thing to be entitled 'Madam'
And foremost walk to fêtes, at eve or morn,
And have a mantle royally up-borne.

A Cook was carried with this pilgrim coil,
The chickens and the marrow-bones to boil,
And powder tarts, and frost the sweatmeats rare.
To London ale, with one draught, he could swear.
And he could roast, and seethe, and broil, and fry,
Make pounded game soups, and well bake a pie.
But great harm was it—as it seem'd to me—
That on his shin an angry sore had he.
But for blanc-mange, he made that with the best.

A SKIPPER was there, come from out the West,
He was at Dartmouth born, for aught I know.
He rode upon a hack-nag, anyhow,
All in a coarse frock reaching to his knee.
A dagger, hanging by a lace, had he
About his neck, under his arm adown.

The summer hot had made his hue all brown,
And certainly he was a fellow good.
Wine had he drawn right often from the wood
In Bourdeaux docks, while that the dealers snored :
For a nice conscience he cared not a cord.
If that he fought, and had the higher hand,
By water he sent them home to every land*.
But of his craft to reckon well each tide,
His inland streams, and unknown strands beside,
His harbour, compass, moon, and gallant trim,
'Twixt Hull and Carthage there was none like him.
Hardy he was, and very wise I reckon :
With many a tempest had his beard been shaken.
He knew well all the havens, as they were,
From Gothland, to the Cape de Finistere,
And every creek in Britain and in Spain :
His jolly bark was call'd the ' Magdelain.'

A DOCTOR OF PHYSIC rode with us along ;
There was none like him in this wide world's throng,
To speak of physic and of surgery ;
For he was grounded in astronomy.
He very much prolong'd his patients' hours

* Verbatim from Chaucer, but the meaning is not very clear. Is it to be inferred that he drowned his piratical prisoners,—“every land” meaning the bottom of the sea ?

By natural magic ; and the ascendant powers
Of figures that he cast, his art could make
Benign of aspect, for his patient's sake.
He knew the cause of every malady,
Were it of cold, or hot, or moist, or dry,
And how engender'd—what the humours were—
He was a very perfect practiser.
The cause once known, and root of the disease,
Anon he placed the sick man at his ease.
Full ready had he his apothecaries
To send him drugs and his electuaries,
And each one made the other sure to win :
Their friendship was no new thing to begin.
Well the old *Æsculapius* he knew,
And *Dioscorides*, and *Rufus* too ;
Hali, and old *Hippocrates*, and *Galen*,
Serapion, *Rasis*, and wise *Avicen* ;
Averroes, *Damascene*, and *Constantin*,
Deep-seeing *Bernard*, *Gatesden*, *Gilbertin*.
His diet by its nutriment weigh'd he,
For to be charged with superfluity
In meat and drink, had been to him a libel.
His study was but little in the Bible.

He was all clad in crimson and sky-grey,
With thin silk lined, and lustrous taffeta.

And yet he was but moderate in expence.
He hoarded what he gain'd i' the pestilence ;
For gold in physic is a cordial old—
Therefore the Doctor specially loved gold.

There was from Bath a good WIFE and a witty ;
But she was somewhat deaf, and that was pity.
In the cloth trade such crowds unto her went,
She beat the looms of Ypres and of Ghent.
In all the parish good wife none was there
That to mass-offering step before her dare ;
And if they did, certain so wrath was she
That she at once forgot all charity.
Her folded head-cloths were of finest ground ;
I durst swear almost that they weigh'd a pound,
Which on the Sunday were upon her head.
Her stockings fine were of a scarlet red,
Full straightly tied, and shone right moist and new.
Bold was her face, and fair and red of hue.
She was a worthy woman to the core :
Five husbands had she brought from the church door ;
Not reckoning other company in youth :
But there's no need to tell this now, in sooth.
And thrice had she been at Jerusalem ;
She had pass'd over many a strange stream.

Cologne she knew ; Bologna, Rome, had seen ;
And in Galicia, at the shrine, had been.
She had known much of journeying by the way.
Her teeth had gaps between them, sooth to say.
Upon an ambler easily she sat,
With wimple large, and on her head an hat,
As broad as is a buckler or a targe.
A riding-skirt about her round hips large
Was tied, and sharp spurs were on both her feet..
In fellowship well could she laugh, and treat
Of remedies of love she learnt by chance,
For of that art she well knew the old dance.

A good man of religion did I see,
And a poor PARSON of a town was he :
But rich he was of holy thought and work.
He also was a learned man, a clerk,
And truly would Christ's holy gospel preach,
And his parishioners devoutly teach.
Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
And patient when adversity was sent ;
Such had he often proved, and loath was he
To curse for tythes and ransack poverty ;
But rather would he give, there is no doubt,
Unto his poor parishioners about,

Of his own substance, and his offerings too.
His wants were humble, and his needs but few.

Wide was his parish—houses far asunder—
But he neglected nought for rain or thunder,
In sickness and in grief to visit all
The farthest in his parish, great and small ;
Always on foot, and in his hand a stave.
This noble example to his flock he gave ;
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught.
Out of the Gospel he that lesson caught,
And this new figure added he thereto,—
That if gold rust, then what should iron do ?
And if a priest be foul, on whom we trust,
No wonder if an ignorant man should rust :
And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
To see an obscene shepherd and clean sheep.
Well ought a priest to all example give,
By his pure conduct, how his sheep should live.

He let not out his benefice for hire,
Leaving his flock encumber'd in the mire,
While he ran up to London, to St. Paul's,
To seek a well-paid chantery for souls,
Or with a loving friend his pastime hold ;
But dwelt at home and tended well his fold,
So that to foil the wolf he was right wary :

He was a shepherd, and no mercenárý.
And though he holy was and virtuous,
He was to sinful men full piteous ;
His words were strong, but not with anger fraught ;
A lore benignant he discreetly taught.
To draw mankind to heaven by gentleness
And good example, was his business.
But if that any one were obstinate,
Whether he were of high or low estate,
Him would he sharply check with altered mien :
A better parson there was no where seen.
He paid no court to pomps and reverence,
Nor spiced his conscience at his soul's expence * ;
But Jesus' lore, which owns no pride or pelf,
He taught—but first he follow'd it himself.

A PLOUGHMAN † hale, his brother, with him rode,
Who of manure had spread full many a load.
A right good, constant, labouring man was he,
Living in peace and perfect charity.
O'er all the world to God he gave his heart
At all times, whether for his gain or smart ;

* That is, he did not embalm or preserve his conscience by sophistries and artificial moralities.

† Ploughman here signifies a small farmer.

And next his neighbour as himself he held.
He thresh'd, made dykes, he planted, or he fell'd,
For Jesus' sake, in aid of each poor wight,
And without hire, when it lay in his might.
His tythes he also paid without a word,
Both of his proper labour and his herd.
In a short frock he rode upon a mare.

A Miller and a Reve were also there ;
A Sompnour and a Pardoner—making four—
A Manciple and myself : there were no more *.

The MILLER was a stout carl, deep of tones ;
Right large he was of brawn, and eke of bones,
Which he proved well, for over all that came
In wrestling he would bear away the ram.
With shoulders broad and short—a knob or gnarr—
There was no door but he 'd heave up the bar,
Or break, by running at it with his head.
His beard as any sow or fox was red,
And thereto broad, as though it were a spade.

* Reve, a steward ; Sompnour, a summoner, the officer (now called an apparitor) who summoned delinquents to appear in ecclesiastical courts ; Pardoner, one who sells pardons, or indulgences, from the Roman See ; Manciple, the caterer or Steward of an Inn of Court.

Upon the tip-top of his nose he had
A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs,
Red as the bristles of a wild sow's ears :
His open nostrils they were black and wide.
A sword and buckler bare he by his side.
His mouth gaped like a furnace, red and great.
He was a huge wag and enjoy'd his prate,
Which mainly turn'd on sin and haunts of vice.
He oft stole corn, and charged, for grinding, thrice.
And yet he had a golden thumb, pardie !
A white coat with a hood of blue had he.
A bagpipe well he play'd with squeal and croon,
And therewithal he brought us out of town.

There was a courteous MANCIPLE of a temple,
And caterers all from him might take example,
How to be wise in furnishing the board ;
For whether that he paid, or had it scored,
He for his bargain would his time so bide
That he was always on the safest side.
Now is not that a sign of heaven's good grace,
When one of such unlearn'd wit should out-pace
The wisdom of a heap of learned men ?

Of gownsmen had he more than three times ten,
Who were in law expert and curious ;

Of which there were a dozen in that house,
Fit to be stewards of the rents and land
Of any lord that dwelleth in Englánd ;—
And make him live well by his own estate
In debtless honour—were his squanderings great,
Or let him live as sparely as he would ;
And all his shire be able to do good
In any ills that fall to mortal lot :—
And yet this Manciple made them fools, I wot.

The REVE he was a slender choleric man.
His beard he shaves as close as ever he can.
His formal hair was shorn stiff round his ears ;
His crown was dock'd as a priest's front appears.
Full long were both his spindle legs, and lean ;
Just like a walking-stick—no calf was seen.
Well could he keep a garner and a bin ;
There was no auditor could on him win.
He knew well by the drought and by the rain,
The yielding of the seed and of the grain.
His lordship's flocks, his dairy, and his herd,
His swine, his horses, stores, and poultry-yard,
Were wholly in this Reve's good governing,
And 'twas his duty to give reckoning.
Since that his lord was twenty years of age

No one could find arrears upon his page.
There was no bailiff, herdsman, groom, or hind,
But he knew all his sleights, and how to find :
They dreaded him as though he had been death.

His dwelling-house stood fair upon a heath ;
With green trees all the place was in soft shade.
A bargain better than his lord he made.
Much riches had he privately in store.
He subtilly pleas'd his lordship evermore,
Who gave and lent him of his substance good :
The Reve got thanks—besides a coat and hood.
In youth a good trade practis'd well had he,
And was a clever hand at carpentry.

This Reve upon a stallion sat, I wot ;
Of apple-spotted grey, and christen'd Scot.
His sky-blue surcoat lengthily was made,
And by his side he bare a rusty blade.
Of Norfolk was this wight of whom I tell,
Near to a town that was call'd Balderswell.
Like to a friar his clothes were tuck'd about ;
And ever he rode the hindmost of the route.

A SOMPNOUR was there with us in that place,
Who had a fire-red cherubin's large face ;
Pimpled and crusted rough, with close eyes narrow :

As hot he was and gamesome as a sparrow.
With scruffy eye-brows black, and blotch-bald beard,
Of his grim visage children were sore afeard.
There was no quicksilver, sugar of lead, nor brimstone,
Borax, litharge, nor oil of tartar—none—
Nor ointment, made to melt away or bite,
That could relieve him of his tumours white,
Or of the hot nobs sitting on his cheeks.
Garlic he much loved, onions too, and leeks,
And for to drink strong wine as red as blood.
Then would he jest, and shout as he were mad;
And when that he large draughts adown had pour'd,
Then, save in Latin, he 'd not speak a word.
In sooth he knew a few terms—two or three,
Which he had gather'd out of some decree :
No wonder, for he heard it all the day.
And certes, as ye know right well, a jay
Can call out *wat* ! as well as can the pope.
But if you tried him further, by one trope,
Then had he spent all his philosophy—
And, "*Quæstio quid juris ?*" would he cry.

He was a liberal varlet, and a kind ;
A better fellow could a man not find.
And he would suffer for a quart of wine,
An honest carl to have his concubine

A twelvemonth, and excuse him at the full.
Right craftily a pigeon could he pull ;
But a good fellow if he took in hand,
He would soon teach him in no awe to stand,
In any case, of the Archdeacon's curse.
But if that a man's soul were in his purse,
Then in his purse well punish'd should he be :
For 'Purse is the Archdeacon's hell,' said he.
But well I wot he lied in act and deed.
Of cursing ought each guilty man take heed.
Curse kills the soul, as absolutions save it ;
Let him shun, also, a *significavit*.

He ruled and managed, after his own guise,
The boys, and girls too, of the diocese,
And knew their ways, and counsels, to a thread.
He had a garland set upon his head,
Large as an ale-house sign hung on a stake.
A buckler had he made him of a cake.

With him there rode a courteous PARDONER
Of Rounceval, his friend and his compeer ;
Who had arrived straight from the Roman See.
Full loud he sung 'Come hither, love, to me !'
Our Sompnour's voice bore a stiff burden round ;
No trombone ever had so great a sound.

This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
But smooth it hung as doth a strike of flax :
By ounces hung the long locks that he had,
And he therewith his shoulders overspread.
Full thin it lay, in single shreds adown,
But hood, for jollity, he would wear none ;
For it was truss'd up in his wallet close.
He thought he rode all in new-fashion'd gloss :
Dishevell'd, save his cap, he rode all bare.
Such glaring eyes he had, as hath an hare.
A picture of our Lord was sew'd on 's cap.
His wallet lay before him in his lap,
Brim full of pardons, come from Rome all hot.
A voice he had as small as hath a goat.
No beard had he, and none could ever have ;
As smooth it was as from the finest shave :
He fitly rode a gelding or a mare.

But of his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,
You could not such another Pardoner trace ;
For in his pack he had a pillow-case,
Which, as he said, was once our Lady's veil.
He said he had a fragment of the sail
Saint Peter held, when, as his heart misgave him
Upon the sea, he pray'd our Lord to save him.
He had a cross of mixt ore, set with stones,

And in a glass-case treasured up pigs' bones.
But with these relics rare, when that he found
A parson poor, dwelling on rustic ground,
He in a single day more money got
Than the poor parson in two months, I wot.
And thus with flattery, feints, and knavish japes,
He made the parson and the people, his apes.

But truly for to tell you all at last,
He was in church a noble ecclesiast.
Well could he read a lesson or a story,
Yet best of all he sang an offertory,
For well he knew when he that song had sung,
That he must preach and polish up his tongue,
To win the silver, as he right well could ;
Therefore he sang the merrier and loud.

Now have I told you shortly in a clause,
The estate, the array, the number, and eke the cause
Why that assembled was this company
In Southwark, at this goodly hostelry,
Which was the Tabard call'd, hard by the Bell.

THE
CUCKOO AND THE NIGHTINGALE ;

MODERNIZED BY
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.



THE

CUCKOO AND THE NIGHTINGALE.

1.

THE God of Love—*ah, benedicite !*
How mighty and how great a Lord is he !
For he of low hearts can make high, of high
He can make low, and unto death bring nigh ;
And hard hearts he can make them kind and free.

2.

Within a little time as hath been found,
He can make sick folk whole and fresh and sound ;
Them who are whole in body and in mind,
He can make sick,—bind can he and unbind
All that he will have bound, or have unbound.

3.

To tell his might my wit may not suffice ;
Foolish men he can make them out of wise ;—
For he may do all that he will devise ;
Loose livers he can make abate their vice,
And proud hearts can make tremble in a trice.

4.

In brief, the whole of what he will, he may ;
Against him dare not any wight say nay ;
To humble or afflict whome'er he will,
To gladden or to grieve, he hath like skill ;
But most his might he sheds on the eve of May.

5.

For every true heart, gentle heart and free,
That with him is, or thinketh so to be,
Now against May shall have some stirring—whether
To joy, or be it to some mourning ; never
At other time, methinks, in like degree.

6.

For now when they may hear the small birds' song,
And see the budding leaves the branches throng,
This unto their remembrance doth bring
All kinds of pleasure mix'd with sorrowing,
And longing of sweet thoughts that ever long.

7.

And of that longing heaviness doth come,
Whence oft great sickness grows of heart and home ;
Sick are they all for lack of their desire ;
And thus in May their hearts are set on fire,
So that they burn forth in great Martyrdom.

8.

In sooth, I speak from feeling, what though now
Old am I, and to genial pleasure slow ;
Yet have I felt of sickness through the May,
Both hot and cold, and heart-aches every day,—
How hard, alas ! to bear, I only know.

9.

Such shaking doth the fever in me keep,
Through all this May that I have little sleep ;
And also 'tis not likely unto me,
That any living heart should sleepy be
In which Love's dart its fiery point doth steep.

10.

But tossing lately on a sleepless bed,
I of a token thought which Lovers heed ;
How among them it was a common tale,
That it was good to hear the Nightingale,
Ere the vile Cuckoo's note be utteréd.

11.

And then I thought anon as it was day,
I gladly would go somewhere to essay
If I perchance a Nightingale might hear,
For yet had I heard none, of all that year,
And it was then the third night of the May.

12.

And soon as I a glimpse of day espied,
No longer would I in my bed abide,
But straightway to a wood that was hard by,
Forth did I go, alone and fearlessly,
And held the pathway down by a brook-side.

13.

Till to a lawn I came all white and green,
I in so fair a one had never been.
The ground was green, with daisy powdered over ;
Tall were the flowers, the grove a lofty cover,
All green and white ; and nothing else was seen.

14.

There sate I down among the fair fresh flowers,
And saw the birds come tripping from their bowers,
Where they had rested them all night ; and they
Who were so joyful at the light of day,
Began to honour May with all their powers.

15.

Well did they know that service all by rote,
And there was many and many a lovely note,
Some, singing loud, as if they had complained ;
Some with their notes another manner feigned ;
And some did sing all out with the full throat.

16.

They pruned themselves, and made themselves right gay,
Dancing and leaping light upon the spray ;
And ever two and two together were,
The same as they had chosen for the year,
Upon Saint Valentine's returning day.

17.

Meanwhile the stream, whose bank I sate upon,
Was making such a noise as it ran on
Accordant to the sweet birds' harmony ;
Methought that it was the best melody
Which ever to man's ear a passage won.

18.

And for delight, but how I never wot,
I in a slumber and a swoon was caught,
Not all asleep and yet not waking wholly,
And as I lay, the Cuckoo bird unholy,
Broke silence, or I heard him in my thought.

19.

And that was right upon a tree fast by,
And who was then ill satisfied but I ?
Now, God, quoth I, that died upon the rood,
From thee and thy base throat, keep all that 's good,
Full little joy have I now of thy cry.

20.

And, as I with the Cuckoo thus 'gan chide,
In the next bush that was me fast beside,
I heard the lusty Nightingale so sing,
That her clear voice made a loud rioting,
Echoing thorough all the green wood wide.

21.

Ah ! good sweet Nightingale ! for my heart's cheer,
Hence hast thou stay'd a little while too long ;
For we have heard the sorry Cuckoo here,
And she hath been before thee with her song ;
Evil light on her ! she hath done me wrong.

22.

But hear you now a wondrous thing, I pray,
As long as in that swooning fit I lay,
Methought I wist right well what these birds meant,
And had good knowing both of their intent,
And of their speech, and all that they would say.

23.

The Nightingale thus in my hearing spake :—
Good Cuckoo, seek some other bush or brake,
And, prithee, let us that can sing dwell here ;
For every wight eschews thy song to hear,
Such uncouth singing verily dost thou make.

24.

What ! quoth she then, what is 't that ails thee now ?
It seems to me I sing as well as thou ;
For mine 's a song that is both true and plain,—
Although I cannot quaver so in vain
As thou dost in thy throat, I wot not how.

25.

All men may understanding have of me,
But, Nightingale, so may they not of thee ;
For thou hast many a foolish and quaint cry :—
Thou say'st OSEE, OSEE, then how may I
Have knowledge, I thee pray, what this may be ?

26.

Ah, fool ! quoth she, wist thou not what it is ?
Oft as I say OSEE, OSEE, I wis,
Then mean I, that I should be wonderous fain
That shamefully they one and all were slain,
Whoever against Love mean aught amiss.

27.

And also would I that they all were dead,
Who do not think in love their life to lead ;
For who is loth the God of Love to obey,
Is only fit to die, I dare well say,
And for that cause OSEE I cry ; take heed !

28.

Ay, quoth the Cuckoo, that is a quaint law,
That all must love or die ; but I withdraw,
And take my leave of all such company,
For mine intent it neither is to die,
Nor ever while I live Love's yoke to draw.

29.

For lovers of all folk that be alive,
The most disquiet have and least do thrive ;
Most feeling have of sorrow's woe and care,
And the least welfare cometh to their share ;
What need is there against the truth to strive ?

30.

What ! quoth she, thou art all out of thy mind,
That in thy churlishness a cause canst find
To speak of Love's true Servants in this mood ;
For in this world no service is so good
To every wight that gentle is of kind.

31.

For thereof comes all goodness and all worth ;
All gentleness and honour thence come forth ;
Thence worship comes, content and true heart's pleasure,
And full-assured trust, joy without measure,
And jollity, fresh cheerfulness, and mirth :

32.

And bounty, lowliness, and courtesy,
And seemliness, and faithful company,
And dread of shame that will not do amiss ;
For he that faithfully Love's servant is,
Rather than be disgraced, would chuse to die.

33.

And that the very truth it is which I
Now say—in such belief I 'll live and die ;
And Cuckoo, do thou so, by my advice.
Then, quoth she, let me never hope for bliss,
If with that counsel I do e'er comply.

34.

Good Nightingale ! thou speakest wondrous fair,
Yet for all that, the truth is found elsewhere ;
For Love in young folk is but rage, I wis ;
And Love in old folk a great dotage is ;
Who most it useth, him 'twill most impair.

35.

For thereof come all contraries to gladness ;
Thence sickness comes, and overwhelming sadness,
Mistrust and jealousy, despite, debate,
Dishonour, shame, envy importunate,
Pride, anger, mischief, poverty and madness.

36.

Loving is aye an office of despair,
And one thing is therein which is not fair ;
For whoso gets of love a little bliss,
Unless it alway stay with him, I wis
He may full soon go with an old man's hair.

37.

And, therefore, Nightingale ! do thou keep nigh,
For trust me well, in spite of thy quaint cry,
If long time from thy mate thou be, or far,
Thou 'lt be as others that forsaken are ;
Then shalt thou raise a clamour as do I.

38.

Fie, quoth she, on thy name, Bird ill beseen !
The God of Love afflict thee with all teen,
For thou art worse than mad a thousand fold ;
For many a one hath virtues manifold,
Who had been nought, if Love had never been.

39.

For evermore his servants Love amendeth,
And he from every blemish them defendeth;
And maketh them to burn, as in a fire,
In loyalty, and worshipful desire,
And when it likes him, joy enough them sendeth.

40.

Thou Nightingale! the Cuckoo said, be still,
For Love no reason hath but his own will;—
For to th' untrue he oft gives ease and joy;
True lovers doth so bitterly annoy,
He lets them perish through that grievous ill.

41.

With such a master would I never be*,
For he, in sooth, is blind, and may not see,
And knows not when he hurts and when he heals;
Within this court full seldom Truth avails,
So diverse in his wilfulness is he.

42.

Then of the Nightingale did I take note,
How from her inmost heart a sigh she brought,
And said, Alas! that ever I was born,
Not one word have I now, I am so forlorn,—
And with that word, she into tears burst out.

* From a manuscript in the Bodleian, as are also stanzas 44 and 45.

43.

Alas, alas ! my very heart will break,
Quoth she, to hear this churlish bird thus speak
Of Love, and of his holy services ;
Now, God of Love ! thou help me in some wise,
That vengeance on this Cuckoo I may wreak.

44.

And so methought I started up anon,
And to the brook I ran, and got a stone,
Which at the Cuckoo hardily I cast,
And he for dread did fly away full fast ;
And glad, in sooth, was I when he was gone.

45.

And as he flew, the Cuckoo ever and aye,
Kept crying, “ Farewell !—farewell Popinjay ! ”
As if in scornful mockery of me ;
And on I hunted him from tree to tree,
Till he was far, all out of sight, away.

46.

Then straightway came the Nightingale to me,
And said, Forsooth, my friend, do I thank thee,
That thou wert near to rescue me ; and now,
Unto the God of Love I make a vow,
That all this May I will thy songstress be.

47.

Well satisfied, I thanked her, and she said,
By this mishap no longer be dismayed,
Tho' thou the Cuckoo heard, ere thou heard'st me ;
Yet if I live it shall amended be,
When next May comes, if I am not afraid.

48.

And one thing will I counsel thee alsó,
The Cuckoo trust not thou, nor his Love's saw ;
All that she said is an outrageous lie.
Nay, nothing shall me bring thereto, quoth I,
For Love, and it hath done me mighty woe.

49.

Yea, hath it ? use, quoth she, this medicine,
This May-time, every day before thou dine,
Go look on the fresh daisy ; then say I,
Altho' for pain thou may'st be like to die,
Thou wilt be eased, and less wilt droop and pine.

50.

And mind always that thou be good and true,
And I will sing one song, of many new,
For love of thee, as loud as I may cry ;
And then did she begin this song full high,
' Beshrew all them that are in love untrue.'

51.

And soon as she had sung it to the end,
Now farewell, quoth she, for I hence must wend ;
And, God of Love, that can right well and may,
Send unto thee as mickle joy this day,
As ever he to Lover yet did send.

52.

Thus takes the Nightingale her leave of me ;
I pray to God with her always to be,
And joy of love to send her evermore ;
And shield us from the Cuckoo and her lore,
For there is not so false a Bird as she.

53.

Forth then she flew, the gentle Nightingale,
To all the Birds that lodged within that dale,
And gathered each and all into one place ;
And them besought to hear her doleful case,
And thus it was that she began her tale.

54.

The Cuckoo—'tis not well that I should hide
How she and I did each the other chide,
And without ceasing, since it was daylight ;
And now I pray you all to do me right
Of that false Bird whom Love can not abide.

55.

Then spake one Bird, and full assent all gave ;
This matter asketh counsel good as grave,
For birds we are—all here together brought ;
And, in good sooth, the Cuckoo here is not ;
And therefore we a Parliament will have.

56.

And thereat shall the Eagle be our Lord,
And other Peers whose names are on record ;
A summons to the Cuckoo shall be sent,
And judgment there be given ; or that intent
Failing, we finally shall make accord.

57.

And all this shall be done, without a nay,
The morrow after Saint Valentine's day,
Under a maple that is well beseen,
Before the chamber-window of the Queen,
At Woodstock, on the meadow green and gay.

58.

She thankéd them ; and then her leave she took,
And flew into a hawthorn by that brook ;
And there she sate and sung—upon that tree,—
“For term of life Love shall have hold of me !”
So loudly, that I with that song awoke.

Unlearned Book and rude, as well I know,
 For beauty thou hast none, nor eloquence,
 Who did on thee the hardiness bestow
 To appear before my Lady? but a sense
 Thou surely hast of her benevolence,
 Whereof her hourly bearing proof doth give;
 For of all good she is the best alive.

Alas, poor Book! for thy unworthiness,
 To show to her some pleasant meanings writ
 In winning words, since thro' her gentleness,
 Thee she accepts as for her service fit;
 Oh! it repents me I have neither wit
 Nor leisure unto thee more worth to give;
 For of all good, she is the best alive.

Beseech her meekly with all lowliness,
 Tho' I be far from her I reverence,
 To think upon my truth and stedfastness,
 And to abridge my sorrow's violence,
 Caused by the wish, as knows your sapience,
 She of her liking, proof to me would give;
 For of all good she is the best alive.

L' ENVOY.

PLEASURE'S AURORA, Day of gladsomeness !
Land, by night, with heavenly influence
Illumined ! root of beauty and goodnesse,
Write, and allay, by your beneficence,
My sighs breathed forth in silence,—comfort give !
Since of all good, you are the best alive.

EXPLICIT.



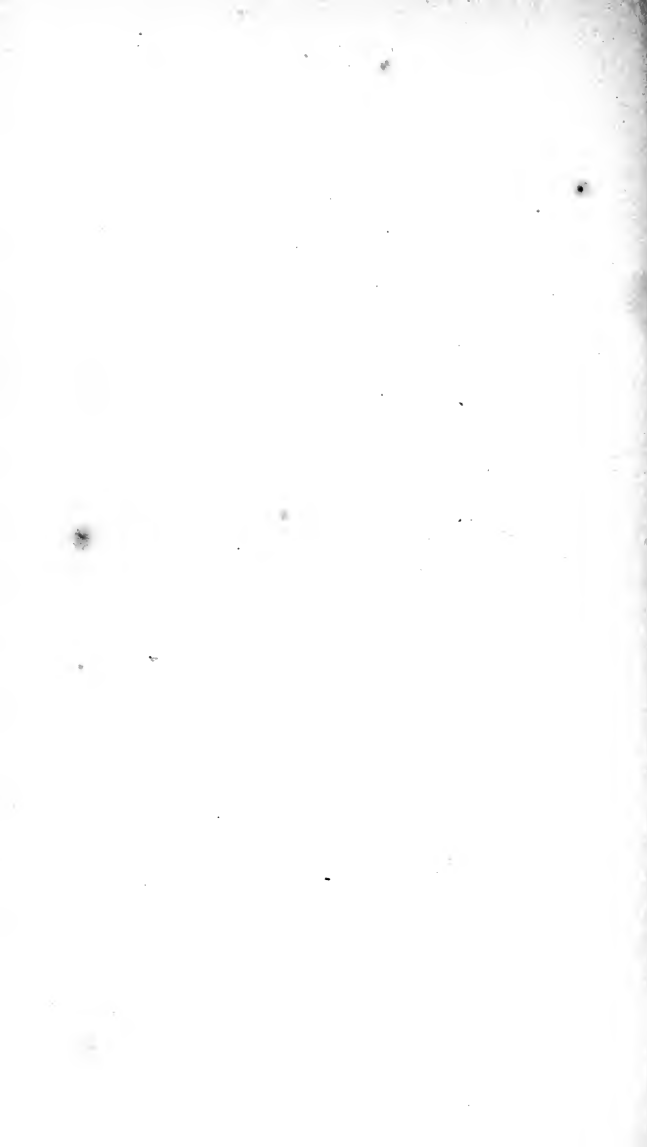
THE LEGENDS

OF

ARIADNE ; PHILOMENE ; AND PHILLIS ;

MODERNIZED BY

THOMAS POWELL.



THE
LEGEND OF ARIADNE.

O JUDGE infernal, Minos—Cretan King !
Thy lot now cometh on the very ring ;
Not for thy sake alone I tell this tale,
But that it may, until all memory fail,
To Theseus cling, for his untruth in love ;
For which the gods that sit in Heaven above,
Are wroth, and wrath have taken for thy sin :
Be red for shame, for I thy life begin.

Minos, who was the mighty king of Crete,
And had a hundred cities strong and great,
To school hath sent his son Androgeus
At Athens, of the which it happened thus,—
That he was slain, learning philosophy
Right in that town, for hate and jealousy !

The puissant Minos, of the which I speak,
With wrath a-flame, comes all his rage to wreak,
And Alcatho besieg'd, fiercely and long ;
But ne'ertheless the walls were built so strong,
And Nisus, who was king of that brave town,
So chivalrous, and of so great renown,
That he for Minos and his warlike host
Caréd no more than if he had been a ghost.
Till on a day a strange adventure fell,
Of which I will, as short as may be, tell.
The daughter fair of Nisus stood upon
The lofty wall, to see the siege go on ;
And looking at the gallant skirmishing,
She cast her heart on Minos, the great king :
And for his beauty, and his chivalry
She longéd so, that she was like to die,
And, faithless to her sire, did on a day
To the besiegers this strong town betray.

Now all the town was at the conqueror's will,
To save whoe'er he list, or else to kill ;
But he requited ill her lovingness,
And let her drench in sorrow and distress,
Nor did the gods to her their pity show ;—
But this to tell, my tale too long would grow.

Now Athens did king Minos take alsó,
And other towns beside this Alcathó ;
And made them send their children year by year,
To be devoured, as ye shall after hear.

A monster had this Minos, and a beast
So cruel, that it could not be increased,
And whensoever a man before him came,
Naked or arm'd, him would he eat the same !
Now every third year, 'tis beyond all doubt,
They cast lots, as the season came about,
Both rich, and poor ; for one his son must take,
And of his child a struggling offering make,
To Minos, that he might reject or kill,
Or let his beast devour him at his will ;
And this hath Minos done in his despite.
T' avenge his son was now his prime delight.

Now home he sailéd when this town was won :
This wicked custom had so long run on,
Till when in Athens, ruled king Egeus,
He must dispatch his dear son Theseus,
Since that the lot hath fallen upon him,
To be devoured by this monster grim.
And forth is led this young and woeful knight

Unto the realm of Minos, full of might,
And in a prison he is chained right fast,
Till time was to the beast he should be cast !

Well mayst thou weep, O woeful Theseus !
To be a king's son, and yet treated thus.
Methinketh that thy love would be most great
To her who saved thee from so dread a fate :
And that if any maid gave help to thee,
Well mightest thou her servant long to be ;
Or else her lover, true and not to fail :
But now to come again to this sad tale !
The dungeon where Prince Theseus was thrown,
Was dark and low, and cold, and built of stone,
And was right near unto the palace wing
Where dwelt the two fair daughters of the King.
It happed thus as Theseus by night
Bewailed his fate, and dreaded morning's light,
Fair Ariadne and her sister heard
In the night's silence every sorrowful word ;
While on a turret looking at the moon
They stood, not caring for their couch so soon ;
And they had sweet compassion on his woe,
For a king's son in prison thus to throw
To be devoured, begat their sympathy.

Then Ariadne spake her sister free,
And said—O sweetest Phædra, sister dear,
This woeful lord's son ye may plainly hear :
How piteously he mourneth his hard fate,
And groaneth o'er his sorrowful estate :—
Guiltless is he, ah ! certes, of the ruth,
And if ye will assist me, by my troth,
He shall be helped, whatever we may do.
And Phædra answered : Sister dear, I trow
I feel for him more than for any man,
And for his aid will do whate'er I can.
Let us the gaoler summon privily,
To come and speak with us right hastily,
And with him shall this woeful prisoner come ;
For if he may this monster overcome,
Then were he free, there is no other boot.
Let us well test him unto his heart's root,
That if he any deadly weapon have
Will he therewith his life fight for, and save,
And combat this strong fiend, or his life end ?
For as he in the prison shall descend,
Ye know right well, the beast is in a place
Which is not dark, and there is ample space
To wield an axe, or sword, a staff, or knife,
So that methinketh he shall save his life :

If that he be a man, he shall do so.
And we will make him many balls of tow
And eke of wax, that when he gapeth fast,
Down the beast's grisly throat he shall them cast,
To slake his hunger, and to blunt his teeth;
And right anon, when valiant Theseus seeth
The beast a-choking, he shall on him leap
And slay him. Chains no more shall Theseus keep :
This weapon shall be gaoler at that tide.
Within the prison in some dark place hide ;
And as the house is guarded to and fro,
And hath so many curious windings too,
Thus quaintly by the skilful mason wrought ;
For this I have a remedy in thought,
That by a clew of twine, as he hath gone,
By the same way he may return anon
By following the thread as he hath come.
And when this beast is fully overcome,
Then may he from his doleful prison flee,
And take the gaoler with him when he's free ;
So shall he come to his own home anon,
Since that he is so great a monarch's son !

This is my plan, if that you dare it take,
But why should I a longer sermon make ?

The gaoler came, and with him Theseus,
And then these things I tell, accorded thus :—
Adown sank Theseus upon his knee,
Ah ! sovran lady of my life, (quoth he)
I, sorrowful man, condemnéd unto death !
From you, while in me lasts my life and breath,
I will not part when this adventure's o'er,
But in your service live for evermore ;
Yea, as a man unknown your bidding tend
For ever till my heart in death shall end.
Forsake I will my royal heritage,
And, as I said, wait on you as a page,
If that ye deign to grant that in this place
I may enjoy your countenance and grace,
A little meat and drink is all I crave,
And for my sustenance will be your slave.
Minos your sire, nor any other wight,
E'er in their life, beheld me with their sight,
And no man else shall ere in me descry
That I am sprung from lineage so high ;
And to my kingly father will I send
This worthy gaoler, that hath been my friend ;
And for his guerdon straightway shall he be
One of the greatest men in my countree.
And if I durst say so, my lady bright,

I am a king's son and likewise a knight,
And would to God, if so that it might be,
We were in my own father's land, all three ;
And I with you to bear you company ;
Then would ye see if that I thereof lie.
Again I proffer you in lowly guise,
To be your page and live beneath your eyes,
Serving you lowly in whatever place ;
And pray to Mars to give me such a grace
That may a shameful death upon me fall
And death and poverty to my dear friends all ;
And that my spirit through the night may go
After my death, and wander to and fro,
If I should ever earn a traitor's name,
And bring upon my knighthood grief and shame.

A seemly knight was Theseus to see,
And young, his age was twenty years and three ;
And whosoe'er had seen his comely face,
He would have wept at his distressful case.
Then Ariadne answered in this wise
To his request, while tears fell from her eyes :—

A King's son art thou, and a knight, (quoth she)
To be my servant in so low degree !

God shield me, for the shame of women all,
That on me such a sorrow should befall,
And send you grace, and strength of heart alsó,
Knight-like to guard yourself and slay your foe :
And grant hereafter that I may you find,
To me, and to my sister here, so kind,
That I repent not that I saved your life.
Yet it were better I should be your wife,
Since that you be as gently born as I,
And have a kingdom of your own fast by,
Than that I suffered knightly blood to wait,
And be my page to swell my father's state,—
This would not profit me, nor your friends dear,
That you should wait upon a lady here—
But what will man not do when urged by fear?—
No ! let us rather altogether go,
You, and eke I, my gentle sister too,
And let her to some noble lord be wed :
This is what I propose ; (the lady said)
Now swear it here, on all that can be sworn.

O, lady mine, (quoth he) or else all torn
May I be with the Minotaur to-morrow,
And have here of my heart its blood and sorrow,
If that ye will : had I a knife or spear,

Forth would I let it gush, and thereon swear
By red-eyed Mars, chief god of my belief,
So may I live, nor fail by foe or grief,—
To-morrow with the monster will I fight;
So shall your faith my promise then requite;
For I would never from my dungeon flee
Till that you should my proofs of true love see.
For, O, believe the gentle words I say,
That I have loved you long full many a day;
Tho' little wist thou, in my own countree;
And evermost have I desired to see
You above every other creature fair.
Upon my truth I you assure, and swear,
These seven years your servant I have been :—
Now am I yours, and also you are mine;
Of Athens Duchess, and my dear heart's queen!

The lady at his ardour smiled serene,
And at his hearty words, and at his cheer;
And to her sister said as ye shall hear.

Oh, gentle sister mine! dear heart! (quoth she)
Now are we duchesses of high degree,
And troth'd to sceptred rulers of Athènes,
And both hereafter likely to be queens,

And saved from shameful death a monarch's son,
May ever gentle woman thus be won—
To save a gentle man, and show her might
In honest causes, that is, in the right :
And well I deem no tongue can ever blame
Our deeds, nor give to us an evil name.
But of this tale I must short matter make,
And therefore Theseus soon his leave did take,
And every point arranged performed indeed,
As ye have in this story heard me read.
The sword and clew, the things that I have said,
Were by the gaoler in the prison laid,
There where the Minotaur was wallowing,
Close to the door, and by the entering ;
And Theseus is led unto his doom,
And to the monster's dwelling is he come.
Then, by the teaching of the lady bright,
He overcame the beast in dreadful fight ;
And out he cometh by the clew again,
Full secretly, when he the beast has slain.
And the old gaoler taketh then a barge,
And filled it with his lady's treasure large,
And took her thence, and eke her sister free :
And now the gaoler, and with him all three,
Are stole away out of the land by night,

And to a foreign shore they took their flight,
Where Theseus had a friend, who bade him rest
And there they sang, and feasted on the best.
Then for a noble barge he sent anon ;
The crew his country-folks were every one ;
And Theseus took his leave, and home sailed he,
Till coming to an isle in the wild sea,
Where living creatures therein dwelleth none
Save wild beasts, and of them full many a one,
He made his ship towards this island steer,
And there a summer's day he had his cheer.

But now, to tell you in the shortest way,
As Ariadne fast in slumber lay,
Because her sister fairer was than she,
By the hand Theseus took her silently,
Unto his rocking ship, and bade the crew
Across the deep their traitorous flight pursue,
And homeward to his country sailed full fast,
With twenty devils driving in the blast,—
And found his father drowned in the salt sea.
False lover ! may thy poison work on thee.

And now for Ariadne let us weep,
Who for her very weariness doth sleep.

Full woefully will she from slumbers wake :
Alas ! for her my heart with ruth doth ache.
Right in the dawning of the day she woke,
And groping in the bed began to look,
But Theseus saw not ; then aloud she said,
Alas ! alas ! that ever I was made !
I am forsaken ;—and her hair she rent,
And to the beach in barefoot haste she went,
And cried aloud, O, Theseus ! my heart's dear,
Where art thou, that I cannot find thee here ?
Full soon shall I by these wild beasts be slain !
The hollow rocks now answered her again.
No man she saw, and yet bright shone the moon,
When high upon a rock she clambered soon,
And saw his barge a-sailing on the sea !
Cold turned her heart, and thus in grief said she ;
Kinder than thou I find the beasts so wild !
Hath he not sinned that hath her thus beguiled ?
Again she cried, O, turn for ruth and sin,
Thy barge hath not got all it's people in.
Her kerchief on a pole then sticketh she,
High in the air, that he the sign must see,
Remembering him that she was left behind,
And turn again his once-loved wife to find.
But all for nought ; his path-way is far gone,

And down she fell and swoonéd on a stone ;
But after a time she rose, and kissed with care
His footmarks on the sand which she found there,
And to her bed in accents mild and low,
Thou bed, (quoth she) that hath receivéd two,
Answer thou shalt for two, and not for one—
Where is the greater part, and whither gone ?
Alas ! what shall I, wretched wight, become ?
For tho' it chance a boat should hither come,
Home to my country dare I never go,
Myself I cannot counsel in my woe.

What should I more of her complaining tell,
It were a heavy thing whereon to dwell ;
In her epistle Ovid telleth all :
But shortly to the end my words shall fall.
The thronéd gods on her their pity took,
And in the sign of Taurus, if you look,
You may behold her starry crown shine clear.
Now will I speak no more of sorrow here ;
But thus this traitorous lover did beguile
A gentle heart ; the devil requite his wile.

THE

LEGEND OF PHILOMENE.

THOU Giver of all forms—thou that hast wrought
This beauteous world, and bare it in thy thought
Eternally, ere thou the work began,
Why madest thou, unto the slander of Man,—
(Or, if indeed the purpose was not thine
To call forth such a blot on thy design ;)
Why didst thou suffer Tereus to be born,
Who was in love so cruel and forsworn ;
That e'en his name, to this world's hearing given,
Breedeth corruption up to the first heaven !
And as for me, so grisly was his deed,
That whensoever this dreadful tale I read
Mine eyes wax dim, and tears begin to flow,
The poison lasts, though bred so long ago ;

Infection in the story lingers still.
This traitor Tereus, of whom I tell,
Was lord of Thrace, to Mars akin at heart—
The cruel god who stands with bloody dart.
And he was wedded with right joyous cheer
Unto Pandion's gentle daughter dear,
And Progne named. Flower of her land was she,
Tho' Juno cared not at the feast to be,
Nor Hymen, that the god of marriage is ;
But at the wedding-feast there were, I wis,
The Furies three, with all their mortal brood.
The owl croak'd all night o'er the neighbouring wood :
The prophet he, of woe, and of mischance.
This revel full of song, and full of dance,
Lasted a fortnight, or a little less ;
But, to abridge this tale of weariness,
(For I am weary of the tale I tell)
His wife and he five years together dwell,
Till on a day she 'gan to long so sore
To see her sister, and her native shore,
That for desire she knew not what to say,
But to her husband she began to pray
By all his love, that she once more might see
Her sister and return full speedily ;
Or else she prayéd that her lord would send,

To bring her back across the sea, some friend :
And this was day by day her constant prayer.
This Tereus bid them straight his ship prepare,
And went himself to fetch the maiden fair,
And to Pandion did he forthwith sue
To vouchsafe to his wife a month or two,
That Philomene, her gentle sister, might
Come to his wife for solace and delight.
' And she shall soon return again to thee ;
Myself will guard her over the salt sea ;
And, as my heart's own life, hers will I keep.'

Whereat Pandion, the old king, 'gan weep
For tenderness of heart, and also grieve
That his dear child her father dear must leave ;
Of all this world he lovéd nothing so,
But at the last he gave her leave to go ;
For Philomene, with salt tears down her face,
Besought assent, and begged her father's grace,
To see her sister whom she longed to greet ;
And then embraceth him, both knees and feet.
Most fair, and young, in bright array was she,
And when that Tereus did her beauty see,
His fiery heart on her bright charms was bent,
And he will have her howsoe'er it went.

And then with wicked looks he kneel'd and prayed,
Until Pandion at the last thus said :
' Now, Son, (quoth he) that art to me so dear,
Take to your care my gentle daughter dear ;
She beareth eke the key of my heart's life,
Greet well my other daughter, thy fair wife,
And give her leave with homeward sail to hie,
That I may see her once before I die !'

Then afterwards he made a mighty feast,
And gathered all his folks, the great and least,
And gave them royal cheer, and presents meet ;
And then they rode adown the master street
Of Athens, bringing Tereus to the sea :
Then turneth home the king right pensively.
Those in the vessel pull the oars full fast,
And unto Thrace arrive they at the last.
Then to a trackless forest Tereus led
Fair Philomene, and to a cave he sped,
And bade her ease her weariness and rest.
Whereat her heart did beat against her breast
Right loud and fast, and then she answered thus—

' Where is my sister, brother Tereus ?'
And therewithal she wept full tenderly,

And quaked for fear all pale and piteously.
Right as the lamb that of the wolf is bitten,
Or as the dove when by the eagle smitten,
And from his iron claws hath just got loose,
Yet trembles still, nor of her wings hath use,
Dreading to be re-taken, so sat she ;
But otherwise, alas ! it cannot be.
The traitor Tereus hath with brute-like power
Rifled the beauty of this virgin flower ;
Yea, by the very villany of might.
Lo ! here a deed to fill all men with fright.
' Sister !' she cried, to air her shriek was given ;
Then ' Father dear, oh ! help me, God in Heaven !'
But all was silent, and no succour came.
Then Tereus worketh yet another shame,
For fear that she his deed should cry aloud,
All in the open air among the crowd,
She of her tongue he with his sword bereft,
And to a castle in a rocky cleft
He took her as a prisoner evermore,
And kept her there in anguish for his store,
So that she ne'er from prison could depart !
O gentle Philomene ! woe 's in thy heart,
Huge are thy sorrows, worse than death their smart ;
God help thee, maid, and send thee some fair boon.

Now it is time I should an end make soon.
This Tereus to his wife is come, and when
He in his arms had taken her again,
Most piteously he wept, and shook his head,
And swore to her he found her sister dead ;
For which the credulous Progne had such woe,
That nigh her sorrowful heart was burst in two.
And thus in tears must I let Progne dwell,
And of her now dumb sister will I tell.

This woeful lady had well learned in youth,
So that she work'd and broider'd upon cloth,
And thus she wove and wrought in tapestry,
As 'twas of yore by women wont to be ;
For truly for to speak, she had her fill
Of meat and drink, and clothing at her will ;
And she could read, and also well indite,
But with a pen I say she could not write ;
Yet silken letters she could weave right well,
And therefore ere the year to winter fell,
She had quite woven in a framework large
How she was brought from Athens in a barge,
And how into a cavern she was brought,
And all the evil things that Tereus wrought ;
She wove it well, and wrote the tale above,

What she had suffered for her sister's love ;
And to a man a ring she gave right soon,
And prayed him by her dumb signs to be gone
Unto the Queen, and give to her that cloth ;
And then by signs she dumbly swore an oath
She would reward him to his heart's content.

This man eftsoons to the Queen Progne went,
And took it her, and all the manner told :
And lo ! when Progne did this work behold,
She never spoke a word for grief and rage,
But feign'd she went upon a pilgrimage
To Bacchus' temple ; and upon a stone
Her poor dumb sister sitting all alone
She found, within her castle weeping sore,
And praying for deliverance evermore.
Alas ! the woe, the solitude, the moan,
The weeping in a castle all alone !
Such ruth o'er her dumb sister Progne maketh,
And each the other in her arms now taketh ;
And thus I let them in their sorrow dwell.

The remnant of the tale I shall not tell :
But sooth to say, thus were these sisters served
That in them had no guilt, nor wrong deserved.

But all ye gentle maids, beware of men
Who swear they love—yet never love again ;
For though he may not venture, for his shame,
To act like Tereus, thus to lose his name,
Nor prove an equal murderer and knave,
Full little while ye shall his true heart have.
This will I say, that were he born my brother,
I'd pray to heaven never to have another.

THE

LEGEND OF PHILLIS.

By proof, as well as by authority,
That wicked fruit cometh of wicked tree,
Which ye may find if that it liketh you ;
But for this end, I speak of nothing new,
To tell you of the false knight Demophon.
In love a falser I have never known,
Except it were his father Theseus—
God, with his grace, from such deliver us.
Thus should all women pray, in doubt and fear,
But now I must relate my story here.

When Troy was laid in ashes utterly,
This Demophon came sailing in the sea
Tow'rds Athens, where he had a palace large.
With him came many a ship and many a barge,

All full of people, of which many a one
Is wounded sore, and sick, and woe begone,
And they have at the siege ten long years lain.
Behind him came a wind, and eke a rain,
That drove so sore, his sails they would not stand :
Above the whole world's worth he long'd for land ;
The tempest hunted him so, to and fro.
So dark it was, he wist not where to go :
And by a wave that struck his vessel's side,
'Twas split adown, and that so low and wide
The carpenter stood still in his affright.
At times the sea flash'd like a torch by night,
Madly, and tosseth Demophon up and down ;
Till Neptune hath his great compassion shown,
And guided the frail barque upon a land
Full fair to view, which own'd the mild command
Of Phillis, who was lady there and queen,
Daughter of great Lycurgus, who, I ween,
Was fairer than the flower against the sun.
Soon as the ship upon the sands had run,
Demophon lands all sick and woe begone,
And with his wretched people every one,
Nigh dead with famine and with weariness,
And groaning for their very sore distress ;
Yea, nearly unto death they all were driven,

When his old men hath this wise counsel given
To seek for help and succour from the Queen,
And crave her grace when she his need had seen.
Sick was he, and he lay almost at death ;
Scarce could he speak, or even draw his breath ;
Till having slept and got a little rest,
When he could walk, he thought it would be best
To seek for succour. In the country he
Was known, and honoured for his ancestry ;
For of rich Athens duke and lord was he,
As Theseus was, great in his chivalry.

This Demophon who was of like renown,
There was no greater in his region known ;
Was like his father in his face and stature,
And false in love—it came to him by nature ;
As of fox Renard, the old fox's son,
Who knows by instinct how to rob, and run,
Without his teaching ; as a drake can swim
When it is hatched and carried to the brim.

This honourable Queen doth give him cheer,
She liked so well his speech and manners fair.
But I must hasten me with my légende,
Which to perform may God his grace me send.

And I shall therefore pass on in this wise :
Ye all have heard of Theseus, his guise.
To make a sad tale short, this Demophon,
By the same way, the self-same path hath gone,
As did his faithless father Theseus ;
For unto Phillis hath he sworn right thus,
To wed her ; and to this his troth did plight,
When he had stolen all the love he might ;
And he was hale and sound and had his rest,
In grove and garden toying as he list.
But I refrain to tell you all their joy,
Or else I could a summer's day employ.
At length he said he must return to where
His kingdom was, her bridal to prepare
Right regally for her becoming state ;
And then he took his leave with weepings great,
Swearing to her he would not long sojourn,
But in a month he would again return.

Forthwith his ships were ready-made to sail,
And home he goeth right before the gale ;
But unto Phillis came he ne'er again.
She watch'd for him, and wept, but all in vain !
Till wearied out, as ancient books record,
She wrought her own death with a silken cord.

But, when she first found out she was betrayed,
She wrote to the false Demophon, and prayed
That he would come and save her from her woe ;
As I shall e'en rehearse a word or two.
But, as for him, he is not worth, I think,
To have upon him spent one drop of ink :
For false in love was he, like to his sire,
So may the devil set both their souls on fire.
But of this letter which she wrote, I ween
It is as well a few words should be seen.

“ Thy hostess (quoth she) oh ! dear Demophon,
Thy Phillis, she that is so woe begone,
Pining alone in Thrace, must now complain
That you have not returned to her again,
True to the promise made upon that day
When that your anchor in our haven lay.
For thus you said, you would return, no doubt,
Ere that the moon had but once gone about ;
But now four times the moon hath hid her face
Since the sad day you sailéd from this place ;
And four times has it lit the world again.
I count the days, and look for you in vain ;
I cannot find your vessel on the sea,
Coming from Athens, back to carry me.

Oh ! if you would but reckon, as a lover,
The time since last we met, you would discover
How much more than a month has past away :—
God wot, I don't complain before my day."

But I have neither time nor space, I wot,
To tell the whole of what the lady wrote.
The letter was right long, and written fair—
I merely take a sentence here and there ;
When as methinks she did express it well,
Therefore another extract will I tell.

She said—"The white sail cometh not again,
And I am left to weep in love and pain ;
But well, too well I know the cause, (quoth she)
For I was of my love to you too free.
Of all the gods in whose great names you swore,
Their vengeance will upon you fall the more,
Till that you are not strong enough to bear
The anguish, but must perish in despair.
Too much, alas ! I trusted to your tongue,
And to your lineage ; to the tears you wrung
From eyes that wept so craftily (quoth she) :
Oh that such tears as those could feignéd be !
And certes if you ever think on me,

This will add nothing to your memory,
That you have thus a loving heart betrayed.
To God pray I, and often have so prayed,
That of your deeds be painted chief of all,
And most in honour, those which now befall;
And when thine ancestors shall painted be,
In which all men their worthiness may see,
Then pray I God that thou be painted so
As I have said, that folks may say, I trow—
'Lo! this is he that with his flattery
Betrayed this maid, and did her villany
Who was his own true love, in thought and deed.'
And in this point they will moreover read
That you are like your father in your smile,
For Ariadne did he thus beguile,
With just such art, and just such subtlety,
Right even as thou hast beguiled me;
For in that point, altho' it be not fair,
Thou followest closely, and thou art his heir.
But since thus sinful to me in my faith,
Beguiling me until I wish for death,
My body soon before your sight will be,
Floating all dead and cold upon the sea,
Right in the port of Athens, where you 're king!
There, without sepulture or burying,

'Twill float about, and make the people moan.
Ah! could it touch your heart, which harder is than
stone!"

And when this letter she sent over sea,
And found how brutal and how false was he,
Despairing, round her neck the thong she cast;
Such grief was hers, bewilder'd by the past.

Ye pitying maidens, while your salt tears flow,
Beware of faithless man, your natural foe!
For even now you may such samples see—
So henceforth trust in love no man but me.

THE MANCIPLE'S TALE;

MODERNIZED

BY LEIGH HUNT.

NOTE.

THE reader is to understand, that all the persons previously described in the "Prologue to the Canterbury Tales," are now riding on their way to that city, and each of them telling his tale respectively, which is preceded by some little bit of incident or conversation on the road. The agreement, suggested by the Host of the Tabard, was, first, that each pilgrim should tell a couple of tales while going to Canterbury, and another couple during the return to London ; secondly, that the narrator of the best one of all should sup at the expense of the whole party ; and thirdly, that the Host himself should be gratuitous guide on the journey, and arbiter of all differences by the way, with power to inflict the payment of travelling expenses upon any one who should gainsay his judgment. During the intervals of the stories he is accordingly the most prominent person.

PROLOGUE

TO THE

MANCIPLE'S TALE.

WOTTEST thou, reader, of a little town,
Which thereabouts they call Bob-up-and-down,
Under the Blee, in Canterbury way* ?
Well, there our host began to jest and play,
And said, Hush, hush now : Dun is in the mire.
What, Sirs ? will nobody, for prayer or hire,
Wake our good gossip, sleeping here behind ?
Here were a bundle for a thief to find.

* The Blee, "a forest in Kent," says the Glossary in Anderson's British Poets. The same authority says, it cannot find Bob-up-and-down in the maps. Probably it was only a nick-name in the neighbourhood, arising either from the uneven nature of the ground, and its *jolting*, or from the sudden appearance of the houses, now up above one another, and now beneath.

See, how he noddeth ! by St. Peter, see !
He'll tumble off his saddle presently.
Is that a Cook of London, red flames take him !
He knoweth the agreement—wake him, wake him :
We'll have his tale, to keep him from his nap,
Although the drink turn out not worth the tap.
Awake, thou cook, quoth he ; God say thee nay ;
What aileth thee to sleep thus in the day ?
Hast thou had fleas all night ? or art thou drunk ?
Or didst thou sup with my good lord the monk,
And hast a jolly surfeit in thine head ?

This cook that was full pale, and nothing red,
Stared up, and said unto the host, God bless
My soul, I feel such wondrous heaviness,
I know not why, that I would rather sleep
Than drink of the best gallon-wine in Cheap.

Well, quoth the Manciple, if it might ease
Thine head, Sir Cook, and also none displease
Of all here riding in this company,
And mine Host grant it, I would pass thee by,
Till thou art better, and so tell *my* Tale ;
For in good faith thy visage is full pale ;

Thine eyes grow dull, methinks ; and sure I am,
Thy breath resembleth not sweet marjoram,
Which showeth thou canst utter no good matter :
Nay, thou mayst frown forsooth, but I'll not flatter.
See, how he gapeth, lo ! this drunken wight ;
He'll swallow us all up before he'll bite ;
Hold close thy mouth, man, by thy father's kin ;
The fiend himself now set his foot therein,
And stop it up, for 'twill infect us all ;
Fie, hog ; fie, pigsty ; foul thy grunt befall.
Ah—see, he bolteth ! there, Sirs, was a swing ;
Take heed—he 's bent on tilting at the ring :
He's the shape, isn't he ? to tilt and ride !
Eh, you mad fool ! go to your straw, and hide.

Now with this speech the cook for rage grew black,
And would have storm'd, but could not speak, alack !
So mumbling something, from his horse fell he,
And where he fell, there lay he patiently,
Till pity on his shame his fellows took.
Here was a pretty horseman of a cook !
Alas ! that he had held not by his ladle !
And ere again they got him on his saddle,
There was a mighty shoving to and fro

To lift him up, and muckle care and woe,
So heavy was this carcase of a ghost.
Then to the Manciple thus spake our Host :—
Since drink upon this man hath domination,
By nails ! and as I reckon my salvation,
I trow he would have told a sorry tale ;
For whether it be wine, or it be ale,
That he hath drank, he speaketh through the nose,
And sneezeth much, and he hath got the *pose* *,
And also hath giv'n us business enow
To keep him on his horse, out of the slough ;
He 'll fall again, if he be driven to speak,
And then, where are we, for a second week ?
Why, lifting up his heavy drunken corse !
Tell on thy Tale, and look we to his horse.
Yet, Manciple, in faith thou art too nice
Thus openly to chafe him for his vice.
Perchance some day he'll do as much for thee,
And bring thy baker's bills in jeopardy,
Thy black jacks also, and thy butcher's matters,
And whether they square nicely with thy platters.

Mine, quoth the Manciple, were then the mire !

* A sort of rheumatic affection.

Much rather would I pay his horse's hire,
And that will be no trifle, mud and all,
Than risque the peril of so sharp a fall.
I did but jest. Score not, ye'll be not scored.
And guess ye what? I have here, in my gourd,
A draught of wine, better was never tasted,
And with this cook's ladle will I be basted,
If he don't drink of it, right lustily.
Upon my life he'll not say nay. Now see.

And true it was, the cook drank fast enough ;
Down went the drink out of the gourd, *fluff, fluff* :
Alas ! the man had had enough before :
And then, betwixt a trumpet and a snore,
His nose said something,—grace for what he had ;
And of that drink the cook was wondrous glad.

Our Host nigh burst with laughter at the sight,
And sigh'd and wiped his eyes for pure delight,
And said, Well, I perceive it 's necessary,
Where'er we go, good wine with us to carry.
What needeth in this world more strifes befall ?
Good wine 's the doctor to appease them all.
O, Bacchus, Bacchus ! blessed be thy name,

That thus canst turn our earnest into game.
Worship and thanks be to thy deity.
So on this head ye get no more from me.
Tell on thy tale, Manciple, I thee pray.

Well, Sire, quoth he, now hark to what I say.

THE MANCIPLE'S TALE ;

OR,

PHŒBUS AND THE CROW.

WHEN Phœbus dwelt with men, in days of yore,
He was the very lustiest bachelor
Of all the world ; and shot in the best bow.
'Twas he, as the old books of stories show,
That shot the serpent Python, as he lay
Sleeping against the sun, upon a day :
And many another noble worthy deed
He did with that same bow, as men may read.

He play'd all kinds of music : and so clear
His singing was, and such a heaven to hear,

Men might not speak during his madrigal.
Amphion, king of Thebes, that put a wall
About the city with his melody,
Certainly sang not half so well as he.
And add to this, he was the seemliest man
That is, or has been, since the world began.
What needs describe his beauty? since there 's none
With which to make the least comparison.
In brief, he was the flower of *gentillesse* *,
Of honour, and of perfect worthiness :
And yet, take note, for all this mastery,
This Phœbus was of cheer so frank and free,
That for his sport, and to commend the glory
He gat him o'er the snake (so runs the story),
He used to carry in his hand a bow.

Now this same god had in his house a crow,
Which in a cage he foster'd many a day,
And taught to speak, as folks will teach a jay.
White was the crow, as is a snow-white swan,
And could repeat a tale told by a man,

* This old French and Anglo-Norman word, answering to the Italian *gentilezza*, and signifying the possession of every species of refinement, has been retained as supplying a want which there is no modern word to fill up.

And sing. No nightingale, down in a dell,
Could sing one hundred-thousandth part so well.

Now had this Phœbus in his house a wife
Which that he loved beyond his very life :
And night and day did all his diligence
To please her well, and do her reverence ;
Save only, to speak truly, *inter nos*,
Jealous he was, and would have kept her close :
He wish'd not to be treated monstrously :
Neither does any man, no more than he ;
Only to hinder wives, it serveth nought ;—
A good wife, that is clean of work and thought,
No man would dream of hind'ring such a way.
And just as bootless is it, night or day,
Hind'ring a shrew ; for it will never be.
I hold it for a very foppery,
Labour in vain, this toil to hinder wives.
Old writers always say so, in their Lives.

But to my story, as it first began.
This worthy Phœbus doeth all he can
To please his wife, in hope, so pleasing her,
That she, for her part, would herself bestir

Discreetly, so as not to lose his grace ;
But, Lord he knows, there's no man shall embrace
A thing so close, as to restrain what Nature
Hath naturally set in any creature.

Take any bird, and put it in a cage,
And do thy best and utmost to engage
The bird to love it ; give it meat and drink,
And every dainty housewives can bethink,
And keep the cage as cleanly as you may,
And let it be with gilt never so gay,
Yet had this bird, by twenty-thousand fold,
Rather be in a forest wild and cold,
And feed on worms and such like wretchedness ;
Yea, ever will he tax his whole address
To get out of the cage, when that he may :—
His liberty the bird desireth aye.

So, take a cat, and foster her with milk
And tender meat, and make her bed of silk,
Yet let her see a mouse go by the wall,
The devil may take, for her, silk, milk, and all,
And every dainty that is in the house ;
Such appetite hath she to eat the mouse.

Lo, here hath Nature plainly domination,
And appetite renounceth education.

A she-wolf likewise hath a villain's kind :
The worst and roughest wolf that she can find,
Or least of reputation, will she wed,
When the time comes to make her marriage-bed.

But misinterpret not my speech, I pray ;
All this of men, not women, do I say ;
For men it is, that come and spoil the lives
Of such, as but for them, would make good wives.
They leave their own wives, be they never so fair,
Never so true, never so debonaire,
And take the lowest they may find, for change.
Flesh, the fiend take it, is so given to range,
It never will continue, long together,
Contented with good, steady, virtuous weather.

This Phœbus, while on nothing ill thought he,
Jilted he was, for all his jollity ;
For under him, his wife, at her heart's root,
Another had, a man of small repute,
Not worth a blink of Phœbus ; more's the pity ;
Too oft it falleth so, in court and city.

This wife, when Phœbus was from home one day,
Sent for her lemman then, without delay.
Her lemman !—a plain word, I needs must own ;
Forgive it me ; for Plato hath laid down,
The word must suit according with the deed ;
Word is work's cousin-german, ye may read :
I'm a plain man, and what I say is this :
Wife high, wife low, if bad, both do amiss :
But because one man's wench sitteth above,
She shall be call'd his Lady and his Love ;
And because t' other's sitteth low and poor,
She shall be call'd,—Well, well, I say no more ;
Only God knoweth, man, mine own dear brother,
One wife is laid as low, just, as the other.

Right so betwixt a lawless, mighty chief
And a rude outlaw, or an arrant thief,
Knight arrant or thief arrant, all is one ;
Diff'rence, as Alexander learnt, there 's none ;
But for the chief is of the greater might,
By force of numbers, to slay all out-right,
And burn, and waste, and make as flat as floor,
Lo, therefore is he clept a Conqueror ;
And for the other hath his numbers less,
And cannot work such mischief and distress,

Nor be by half so wicked as the chief,
Men clepen him an outlaw and a thief.

However, I am no text-spinning man ;
So to my tale I go, as I began.

Now with her lemman is this Phœbus' wife ;
The crow he sayeth nothing, for his life ;
Cag'd hangeth he, and sayeth not a word ;
But when that home was come Phœbus the lord,
He singeth out, and saith,—Cuckoo ! cuckoo !
Hey ! crieth Phœbus ; here be something new ;
Thy song was wont to cheer me. What is this ?
By Jove ! quoth Corvus, I sing not amiss.
Phœbus, quoth he, for all thy worthiness,
For all thy beauty and all thy gentillesse,
For all thy song and all thy minstrelsy,
And all thy watching, bleared is thine eye ;
Yea, and by one no worthier than a gnat,
Compar'd with him should boast to wear thine hat.

What would you more ? the crow hath told him all ;
This woeful god hath turn'd him to the wall
To hide his tears : he thought 'twould burst his heart ;
He bent his bow, and set therein a dart,

And in his ire he hath his wife yslain ;
He hath ; he felt such anger and such pain ;
For sorrow of which he brake his minstrelsy,
Both harp and lute, gittern and psaltery,
And then he brake his arrows and his bow,
And after that, thus spake he to the crow :—

Traitor, quoth he, behold what thou hast done ;
Made me the saddest wretch beneath the sun :
Alas ! why was I born ! O dearest wife,
Jewel of love and joy, my only life,
That wert to me so stedfast and so true,
There liest thou dead ; why am not I so too ?
Full innocent thou wert, that durst I swear ;
O hasty hand, to bring me to despair !
O troubled wit, O anger without thought,
That unadvised smitest, and for nought :
O heart of little faith, full of suspicion,
Where was thy handsomeness and thy discretion ?
O every man, hold hastiness in loathing ;
Believe, without strong testimony, nothing ;
Smite not too soon, before ye well know why ;
And be advised well and soberly
Before ye trust yourselves to the commission
Of any ireful deed upon suspicion.

Alas ! a thousand folk hath hasty ire
Foully foredone, and brought into the mire.
Alas ! I 'll kill myself for misery.

And to the crow, O thou false thief ! said he,
I 'll quit thee, all thy life, for thy false tale ;
Thou shalt no more sing like the nightingale,
Nor shalt thou in those fair white feathers go,
Thou silly thief, thou false, black-hearted crow ;
Nor shalt thou ever speak like man again ;
Thou shalt not have the power to give such pain ;
Nor shall thy race wear any coat but black,
And ever shall their voices crone and crack
And be a warning against wind and rain,
In token that by thee my wife was slain.

So to the crow he started, like one mad,
And tore out every feather that he had,
And made him black, and reft him of his stores
Of song and speech, and flung him out of doors
Unto the devil ; whence never come he back,
Say I. Amen. And hence all crows are black.

Lordings, by this example I you pray
Take heed, and be discreet in what you say ;

And above all, tell no man, for your life,
How that another man hath kiss'd his wife.
He 'll hate you mortally ; be sure of that ;
Dan Solomon, in teacher's chair that sat,
Bade us keep all our tongues close as we can ;
But, as I said, I 'm no text-spinning man,
Only, I must say, thus taught me my dame * ;
My son, think on the crow in God his name ;
My son, keep well thy tongue, and keep thy friend ;
A wicked tongue is worse than any fiend ;
My son, a fiend's a thing for to keep down ;
My son, God in his great discretion
Walléd a tongue with teeth, and eke with lips,
That man may think, before his speech out slips.
A little speech spoken advisedly
Brings none in trouble, speaking generally.
My son, thy tongue thou always shouldst restrain,

* The sententious sermon, which here follows, might have had a purely serious intention in Chaucer's time, when books were rare, and moralities not such common-places as they are now ; yet it is difficult to believe that the poet did not intend something of a covert satire upon, at least, the sermonizer's own pretensions, especially as the latter had declared himself against text-spinning. The Host, it is to be observed, had already charged him with forgetting his own faults, while preaching against those of others. The *refashioner* of the original lines has accordingly endeavoured to retain the kind of tabernacle, or old woman's, tone, into which he conceives the Manciple to have fallen, compared with that of his narrative style.

Save only at such times thou dost thy pain
To speak of God in honour and in prayer ;
The chiefest virtue, son, is to beware
How thou let'st loose that endless thing, thy tongue ;
This every soul is taught, when he is young :
My son, of muckle speaking ill advised,
And where a little speaking had sufficed,
Cometh muckle harm. This was me told and taught,—
In muckle speaking, sinning wanteth nought.
Know'st thou for what a tongue that's hasty serveth ?
Right as a sword forecutheth and forecarveth
An arm in two, my dear son, even so
A tongue clean-cutheth friendship at a blow.
A jangler is to God abominable :
Read Solomon, so wise and honourable ;
Read David in his Psalms, read Seneca ;
My son, a nod is better than a say ;
Be deaf, when folk speak matter perilous ;
Small prate, sound pate,—guardeth the Fleming's house.
My son, if thou no wicked word hast spoken,
Thou never needest fear a pate ybroken ;
But he that hath mis-said, I dare well say,
His fingers shall find blood thereon, some day.
Thing that is said, is said ; it may not back
Be call'd, for all your ' Las ! ' and your ' Alack ! '

And he is that man's thrall to whom 'twas said ;
Cometh the bond some day, and will be paid.
My son, beware, and be no author new
Of tidings, whether they be false or true :
Go wheresoe'er thou wilt, 'mongst high or low,
Keep well thy tongue, and think upon the crow.

THE

RIME OF SIRE THOPAS;

MODERNIZED BY

Z. A. Z.



PROLOGUE TO SIR THOPAS.

1.

Now when the Prioress had done, each man,
So serious look'd, 'twas wonderful to see !
Till our good host to banter us began,
And then at last he cast his eyes on me,
And jeering said, " What man art thou ? (quoth he)
That lokest down, as thou wouldst find a hare *,
For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.

2.

Approach me near, and look up merrily !
Now make way, Sirs ! and let this man have place,
He in the waist is shaped as well as I :

* In this Prologue Chaucer gives the portrait of himself.

This were a poppet in an arm's embrace,
For any woman, small and fair of face.
He seemeth elf-like by his countenance,
For with no wight holdeth he dalliance.

3.

Say somewhat now, since other folks have said;
Tell us a tale o' mirth, and that anon."
"Host," quoth I then, "be not so far misled,
For other tales except this know I none;
A little rime I learned in years ago."
"Ah! that is well," quoth he; "now we shall hear
Some dainty thing, methinketh, by thy cheer."

THE RIME OF SIR THOPAS.

FYTTE THE FIRST.

1.

LISTEN, lordlings, in good intent,
And I will tell you *verament*
Of mirth and chivalry,
About a knight on glory bent,
In battle and in tournament ;
Sir Thopas named was he.

2.

And he was born in a far countr y,
In Flanders, all beyond the sea,
At Popering in the place ;
His father was a man full free,
And of that country lord was he,
Enjoyed by Holy Grace.

3.

Sir Thopas was a doughty swain,
Fair was his face as *pain de Maine*,
His lips were red as rose ;
His ruddy cheeks like scarlet grain ;
And I tell you in good certaine,
He had a seemly nose.

4.

His hair, and beard, like saffron shone,
And to his girdle fell adown ;
His shoes of leather bright ;
Of Bruges were his hose so brown,
His robe it was of ciclatoun *—
He was a costly wight.

5.

Well could he hunt the strong wild deer,
And ride a hawking for his cheer
With grey goshawk on hand ;
His archery fill'd the woods with fear,
In wrestling eke he had no peer,—
No man 'gainst him could stand.

* Written by Spenser *checklaton*, and by some supposed to have been a species of base metal like gold ; by others, more probably (especially in instances like the present), the cloth of gold, of which a kind of circular state-robe was made.

6.

Full many a maiden bright in bower
Was sighing for him *par amour*
Between her prayers and sleep ;
But he was chaste, beyond their power,
And sweet as is the bramble flower *
That beareth the red hip.

7.

And so it fell upon a day,
Forsooth, as I now sing and say,
Sir Thopas went to ride ;
He rode upon his courser grey,
And in his hand a lance so gay,
A long sword by his side.

8.

He rode along a forest fair,
Many a wild beast dwelling there ;
(Mercy in Heaven defend !)
And there was also buck and hare ;
And as he went, he very near
Met with a sorry end.

* No doubt the word bramble bore this signification in Chaucer's time ; but now it is the bramble which bears the blackberry, and the wild rose the hip. *Ed.*

9.

And herbs sprang up, or creeping ran ;
The liquorice, and valerian,
 Clove-gillyflowers, sun-dress'd ;
And nutmeg, good to put in ale,
Whether it be moist or stale,—
 Or to lay sweet in chest.

10.

The birds all sang, as tho' 'twere May ;
The spearhawk, and the popinjay,
 It was a joy to hear ;
The throstle cock made eke his lay,
The wood-dove sung upon the spray,
 With note full loud and clear.

11.

Sir Thopas fell in love-longing
All when he heard the throstle sing,
 And spurr'd his horse like mad,
So that all o'er the blood did spring,
And eke the white foam you might wring :
 The steed in foam seem'd clad.

12.

Sir Thopas eke so weary was
Of riding on the fine soft grass,
While love burnt in his breast,
That down he laid him in that place
To give his courser some soláce,
Some forage and some rest.

13.

Saint Mary ! benedicite !
What meaneth all this love in me,
That haunts me in the wood ?
This night, in dreaming, did I see
An elf queen shall my true love be,
And sleep beneath my hood.

14.

An elf queen will I love, I wis,
For in this world no woman is
Worthy to be my bride ;
All other damsels I forsake,
And to an elf queen will I take,
By grove and streamlet's side.

15.

Into his saddle he clomb anon,
And pricketh over stile and stone,
 An elf queen to espie ;
Till he so long had ridden and gone,
That he at last upon a morn
 The Fairy Land came nigh.

16.

Therein he sought both far and near,
And oft he spied in daylight clear
 Through many a forest wild ;
But in that wondrous land I ween,
No living wight by him was seen,
 Nor woman, man, nor child.

17.

At last there came a giant gaunt,
And he was named Sire Oliphaunt,
 A perilous man of deed :
And he said, “ Childe, by Termagaunt,
If thou ride not from this my haunt,
 Soon will I slay thy steed

With this victorious mace ;
For here's the lovely Queen of Faery,
With harp and pipe and symphony,
A-dwelling in this place."

18.

Childe Thopas said right haughtily,
"To-morrow will I combat thee
In armour bright as flower ;
And then I promise '*par ma fay*'
That thou shalt feel this javelin gay,
And dread its wondrous power.
To-morrow we shall meet again,
And I will pierce thee, if I may,
Upon the golden prime of day ;—
And here you shall be slain."

19.

Sir Thopas drew aback full fast ;
The giant at him huge stones cast,
Which from a staff-sling fly ;
But well escaped the Childe Thopás,
And it was all thro' God's good grace,
And through his bearing high.

20.

Still listen, gentles, to my tale,
Merrier than the nightingale :—
For now I must relate,
How that Sir Thopas rideth o'er
Hill and dale and bright sea shore,
E'en to his own estate.

21.

His merry men commandeth he
To make for him the game and glee ;
For needs he must soon fight
With a giant fierce, with strong heads three,
For paramour and jollity,
And chivalry so bright.

22.

“ Come forth,” said he, “ my minstrels fair,
And tell me tales right debonaire,
While I am clad and armed ;
Romances, full of real tales,
Of dames, and popes, and cardinals,
And maids by wizards charmed.

23.

They bore to him the sweetest wine
In silver cup ; the muscadine,
 With spices rare of Ind ;
Fine gingerbread, in many a slice,
With cummin seed, and liquorice,
 And sugar thrice refin'd.

24.

Then next to his white skin he ware
A cloth of fleecy wool, as fair,
 Woven into a shirt ;
Next that he put a cassock on,
And over that an habergeon,
 To guard right well his heart.

25.

And over that a hauberk went
Of Jews' work, and most excellent ;
 Full strong was every plate ;
And over that his coat armou're,
As white as is the lily flower,
 In which he would debate.

26.

His shield was all of gold so red,
And thereon was a wild boar's head,
A carbuncle beside ;
And then he swore on ale and bread,
How that the giant should be dead,
What ever should betide !

27.

His boots were glazed right curiously,
His sword-sheath was of ivory,
His helm all brassy bright ;
His saddle was of jet-black bone,
His bridle like the bright sun shone,
Or like the clear moon's light.

28.

His spear was of the cypress tree,
That bodeth battle right and free ;
The point full sharp was ground ;
His steed it was a dapple grey,
That goeth an amble on the way,
Full softly and full round.

29.

Lo ! lordlings mine, here ends one fyttē
Of this my Tale, a gallant strain ;
And if ye will hear more of it,
I'll soon begin again.

FYTTE THE SECOND.

1.

Now hold your speech for charity,
Both gallant knight and lady free,
And hearken to my song
Of battle and of chivalry,
Of ladies' love and minstrelsy,
All ambling thus along.

2.

Men speak much of old tales I know ;
Of Hornchild, Ipotis, alsó
Of Bevis and Sir Guy ;
Of Sire Libeaux, and Pleindamour ;
But Sire Thopas, he is the flower
Of real chivalry.

3.

Now was his gallant steed bestrode,
And forth upon his way he rode,
 As spark flies from a brand ;
Upon his crest he bare a tower,
And therein stuck a lily flower :
 Save him from giant hand !

4.

He was a knight in battle bred,
And in no house would seek his bed,
 But laid him in the wood ;
His pillow was his helmet bright,—
His horse grazed by him all the night
 On herbs both fine and good.

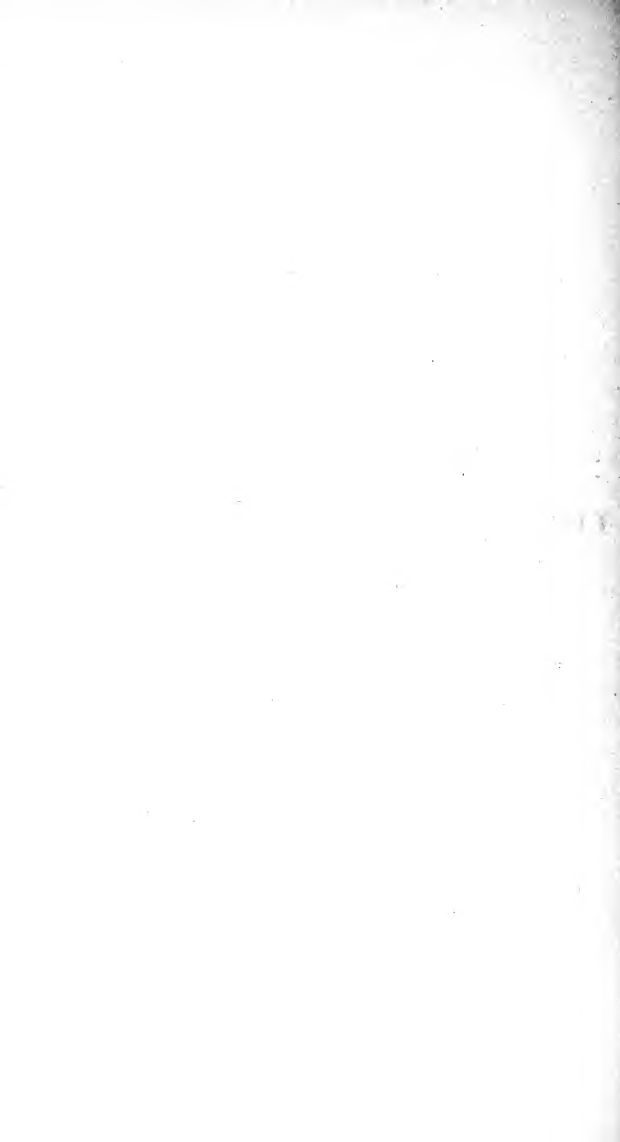
5.

And he drank water from the well,
As did the knight Sir Percival,
 So worthy under weed ;
Till on a day——

[Here Chaucer is interrupted in his Rime.]

EPILOGUE TO RIME.

“No more of this, for Heaven’s high dignity!”
Quoth then our Host, “for, lo! thou makest me
So weary of thy very simpleness,
That all so wisely may the Lord me bless,
My very ears, with thy dull rubbish, ache.
Now such a rime at once let Satan take.
This may be well called ‘doggrel rime,’” quoth he.
“Why so?” quoth I; “why wilt thou not let me
Tell all my Tale, like any other man,
Since that it is the best rime that I can?”
“Mass!” quoth our Host, “if that I hear aright,
Thy scraps of rhyming are not worth a mite;
Thou dost nought else but waste away our time:—
Sir, at one word, thou shalt no longer rhyme.”



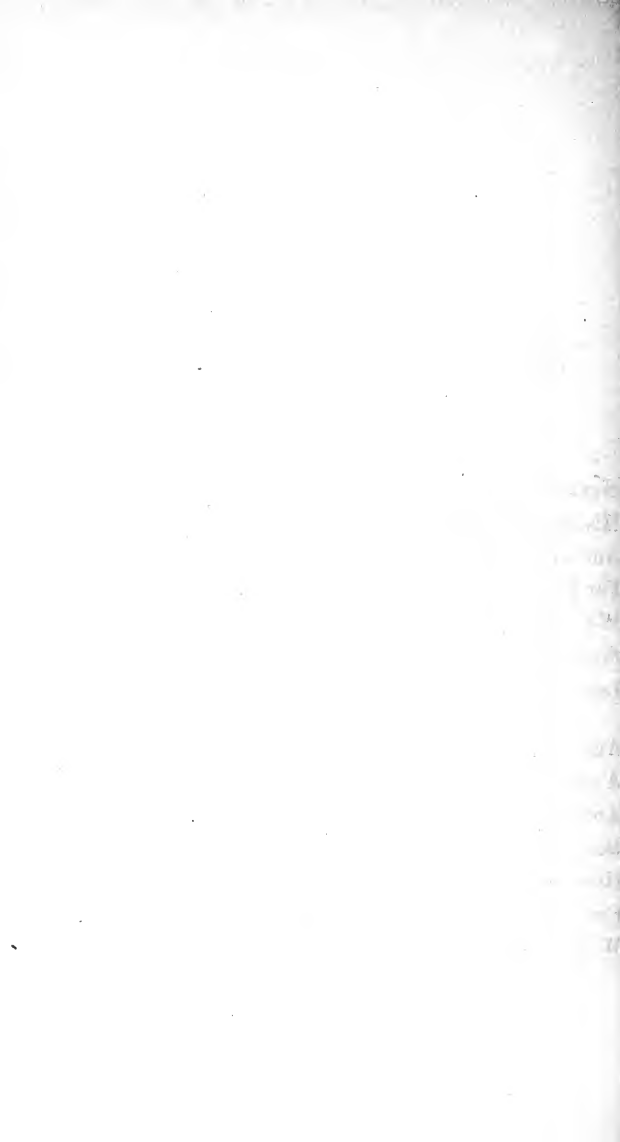
EXTRACT

FROM

TROILUS AND CRESIDA;

MODERNIZED BY

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.



EXTRACT

FROM

TROILUS AND CRESIDA.

Next morning Troilus began to clear
His eyes from sleep, at the first break of day,
And unto Pandarus, his own brother dear,
For love of God, full piteously did say,
We must the Palace see of Cresida ;
For since we yet may have no other feast,
Let us behold her Palace at the least !

And therewithal to cover his intent
A cause he found into the town to go,
And they right forth to Cresid's Palace went ;
But, Lord, this simple Troilus was woe,
Him thought his sorrowful heart would burst in two ;
For when he saw her doors fast-bolted all,
Well nigh for sorrow down he 'gan to fall.

Therewith when this true Lover 'gan behold
How shut was every window of the place,
Like frost he thought his heart was icy cold ;
For which, with changéd pale and deadly face,
Without word utter'd, forth he 'gan to pace ;
And on his purpose bent so fast to ride,
That no wight his continuance espied.

Then said he thus,—O Palace desolate !
O house of houses, once so richly dight ;
O Palace empty and disconsolate !
Thou Lamp, of which extinguished is the light ;
O Palace whilom day that now art night,
Thou ought'st to fall and I to die ; since she
Is gone who held us both in sovereignty.

O of all houses once the crowned boast !
Palace illumined with the sun of bliss ;
O ring of which the ruby now is lost,
O cause of woe, that cause hast been of bliss :
Yet, since I may no better, would I kiss
Thy cold doors ; but I dare not for this rout :
Farewell, thou shrine of which the Saint is out !

Therewith he cast on Pandarus his eye,
With changéd face, and piteous to behold ;
And when he might his time aright espy,
Aye, as he rode, to Pandarus he told
Both his new sorrow and his joys of old,
So piteously, and with so dead a hue,
That every wight might on his sorrow rue.

Forth from the spot he rideth up and down,
And every thing to his remembrance
Came as he rode by places of the town
Where he had felt such perfect pleasure once.
Lo, yonder saw I mine own lady dance,
And in that Temple she with her bright eyes,
My Lady dear, first bound me captive-wise.

And yonder with joy-smitten heart have I
Heard my own Cresid's laugh ; and once at play
I yonder saw her eke full blissfully ;
And yonder once she unto me 'gan say—
Now my sweet Troilus, love me well I pray ;
And there so graciously did me behold,
That hers unto the death my heart I hold.

And at the corner of that self-same house
Heard I my most belovéd Lady dear,
So womanly with voice melodious
Singing so well, so goodly, and so clear,
That in my soul methinks I yet do hear
The blissful sound ; and in that very place
My Lady first me took unto her grace.

O blissful God of Love ! then thus he cried,
When I the process have in memory,
How thou hast wearied me on every side,
Men thence a book might make, a history ;
What need to seek a conquest over me
Since I am wholly at thy will ? what joy
Hast thou thy own liege subjects to destroy ?

Dread Lord ! so fearful when provoked thine ire,
Well hast thou wreaked on me by pain and grief ;
Now mercy, Lord ! thou knowest well I desire
Thy grace above all pleasures first and chief ;
And live and die I will in thy belief ;
For which I ask for guerdon but one boon,
That Cresida again thou send me soon.

Constrain her heart as quickly to return,
As thou dost mine with longing her to see,
Then know I well that she would not sojourn.
Now, blissful Lord, so cruel do not be
Unto the blood of Troy, I pray of thee,
As Juno was unto the Theban blood,
From whence to Thebes came griefs in multitude.

And after this he to the gate did go
Whence Cresida rode, as if in haste she was;
And up and down there went, and to and fro,
And to himself full oft he said, alas!
From hence my hope and solace forth did pass.
O would the blissful God now for his joy,
I might her see again coming to Troy.

And up to yonder hill was I her guide;
Alas, and there I took of her my leave;
Yonder I saw her to her father ride,
For very grief of which my heart shall cleave;—
And hither home I came when it was eve;
And here I dwell an outcast from all joy,
And shall, unless I see her soon in Troy.

And of himself did he imagine oft,
That he was blighted, pale, and waxen less
Than he was wont ; and that in whispers soft
Men said, what may it be, can no one guess
Why Troilus hath all this heaviness ?
All which he of himself conceited wholly
Out of his weakness and his melancholy.

Another time he took into his head,
That every wight, who in the way passed by,
Had of him ruth, and fancied that they said,
I am right sorry Troilus will die :
And thus a day or two drove wearily ;
As ye have heard ; such life 'gan he to lead
As one that standeth betwixt hope and dread.

For which it pleased him in his songs to show
The occasion of his woe, as best he might ;
And made a fitting song, whose words but few,
Somewhat his woeful heart to make more light ;
And when he was removed from all men's sight,
With a soft voice, he of his lady dear,
That absent was, 'gan sing as ye may hear.

O Star, of which I lost have all the light,
With a sore heart well ought I to bewail,
That ever dark in torment, night by night,
Toward my death with wind I steer and sail ;
For which upon the tenth night if thou fail
With thy bright beams to guide me but one hour,
My ship and me Charybdis will devour.

As soon as he this song had thus sung through,
He fell again into his sorrows old ;
And every night, as was his wont to do,
Troilus stood the bright moon to behold ;
And all his trouble to the moon he told,
And said ; I wis, when thou art horn'd anew,
I shall be glad if all the world be true.

Thy horns were old as now upon that morrow,
When hence did journey my bright Lady dear,
That cause is of my torment and my sorrow ;
For which, oh, gentle Luna, bright and clear,
For love of God, run fast above thy sphere ;
For when thy horns begin once more to spring,
Then shall she come, that with her bliss may bring.

The day is more, and longer every night
Than they were wont to be—for he thought so ;
And that the sun did take his course not right,
By longer way than he was wont to go ;
And said, I am in constant dread I trow,
That Phaeton his son is yet alive,
His too fond Father's car amiss to drive.

Upon the walls fast also would he walk,
To the end that he the Grecian host might see ;
And ever thus he to himself would talk :—
Lo, yonder is mine own bright Lady free ;
Or yonder is it that the tents must be ;
And thence does come this air which is so sweet,
That in my soul I feel the joy of it.

And certainly this wind, that more and more
By moments thus increaseth in my face,
Is of my Lady's sighs heavy and sore ;
I prove it thus ; for in no other space
Of all this town, save only in this place,
Feel I a wind, that soundeth so like pain ;
It saith, Alas, why severed are we twain.

A weary while in pain he tosseth thus,
Till fully past and gone was the ninth night ;
And even at his side stood Pandarus,
Who busily made use of all his might
To comfort him, and make his heart too light ;
Giving him always hope, that she the morrow
Of the tenth day will come, and end his sorrow.

THE REVE'S TALE;

MODERNIZED

By R. H. HORNE.

NOTE.

It has been thought that an idea of the extraordinary versatility of Chaucer's genius could not be adequately conveyed unless one of his matter-of-fact comic tales were attempted. The *Reve's* has accordingly been selected, as presenting a graphic painting of characters,—equal to those contained in the “Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*,”—displayed in action by means of a story which may be designated as a broad farce ending in a pantomime of absurd reality.

To those who are acquainted with the original, an apology may not be considered inadmissible for certain necessary variations and omissions.

THE
REVE'S PROLOGUE.

WHEN all had laugh'd at this right foolish case
Of Absalom and credulous Nicholas *,
Diverse folk diversely their comments made.
But, for the most part, they all laugh'd and play'd,
Nor at this tale did any man much grieve,
Unless indeed 'twas Oswald, our good Reve.
Because that he was of the carpenter craft,
In his heart still a little ire is left.
He 'gan to grudge it somewhat, as scarce right ;
' So aid me !' quoth he ; ' I could such requite

* Alluding to the "Miller's Tale," which has rather offended the Reve, by reason that it ridiculed a worthy carpenter.

By throwing dust in a proud miller's eye,
 If that I chose to speak of ribaldry.
 But I am old ; I cannot play for age ;
 Grass-time is done—my fodder is now forage ;
 This white top sadly writeth mine old years ;
 Mine heart is also mouldy'd as mine hairs :
 And since I fare as doth the medlar tree,
 That fruit with time grows ever the worse to be,
 Till it be rotten in rubbish and in straw.

‘ We old men, as I fear, the same lot draw ;
 Till we be rotten can we not be ripe.
 We ever hop while that the world will pipe ;
 For in our will there sticketh ever a nail,
 To have a hoary head and a green tail,
 As hath a leek ; for though our strength be lame,
 Our will desireth folly ever the same ;
 For when our climbing's done, our words aspire ;
 Still in our ashes old is reeking fire *.

* Or thus :—

For when our climbing's done our speech aspires ;
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

The original lines are :—

“ For whanne we may not don than wol we spoken,
 Yet in our ashen olde is fyre yreken.”

The coincidence of the last line with the one quoted from Gray's *Elegy* will

' Four hot coals have we, which I will express :
 Boasting, lying, anger, and covetousness.
 These burning coals are common unto age,
 Our old limbs well may stumble o'er the stage,
 But will shall never fail us, that is sooth.
 Still in my head was always a colt's tooth,
 As many a year as now is pass'd and done,
 Since that my tap of life began to run.
 For certainly when I was born, I trow,
 Death drew the tap of life, and let it flow ;
 And ever since the tap so fast hath run,
 That well-nigh empty now is all the tun.
 The stream of life but drips from time to time ;
 The silly tongue may well ring out and chime
 Of wretchedness, that passéd is of yore :
 With aged folk, save dotage, there's nought more.'

he remarked. Mr. Tyrwhit says, he should certainly have considered the latter as an "imitation" (of Chaucer), "if Mr. Gray himself had not referred us to the 169 (170) Sonnet of Petrarch, as his original:—

Ch' i' veggio nel pensier, dolce mio foco,
 Fredda una lingua, e duo begli occhi chiusi
 Rimaner dopo noi pien' di faville.

The sentiment is different in all three; but the form of expression, here adopted by Gray, closely resembles that of the Father of English Poetry; although, in Gray's time, it was no doubt far more elegant to quote Petrarch than Chaucer.

When that our Host had heard this sermoning,
He 'gan to speak as lordly as a king;
And said, ' Why, what amounteth all this wit?
What! shall we speak all day of holy writ?
The devil can make a steward fit to preach,
Or of a cobbler a sailor, or a leach.
Say forth thy tale; and tarry not the time.
Lo Deptford! and the hour is half way prime:
Lo Greenwich!—there where many a shrew loves sin—
It were high time thy story to begin.'

' Now, fair sirs!' quoth this Oswald, the old Reve,
' I pray you all that you yourselves ne'er grieve,
Though my reply should somewhat fret his nose;
For lawful 'tis with force, force to oppose.
This drunken Miller hath informed us here
How that some folks beguiled a carpenter—
Perhaps in scorn that I of yore was one.
So, by your leave, him I'll requite anon.
In his own churlish language will I speak,
And pray to heaven besides, his neck may break.
A small stalk in mine eye he sees, I deem,
But in his own he cannot see a beam.

THE REVE'S TALE.

AT Trumpington, near Cambridge, if you look,
There goeth a bridge, and under that a brook,
Upon which brook there stood a flour-mill ;
And this is a known fact that now I tell.
A Miller there had dwelt for many a day ;
As any peacock he was proud and gay.
He could pipe well, and fish, mend nets, to boot,
Turn cups with a lathe, and wrestle well, and shoot.
A Norman dirk, as brown as is a spade,
Hung by his belt, and eke a trenchant blade.
A jolly dagger bare he in his pouch :
There was no man, for peril, durst him touch.
A Sheffield clasp-knife lay within his hose.
Round was his face, and broad and flat his nose.

High and retreating was his bald ape's skull :
He swagger'd when the market-place was full.
There durst no wight a hand lift to resent it,
But soon, this Miller swore, he should repent it.

A thief he was, forsooth, of corn and meal,
A sly one, too, and used long since to steal.
Disdainful Simkin, was he called by name.
A wife he had ; of noble kin she came :
The rector of the town her father was.
With her he gave full many a pan of brass,
That Simkin with his blood should thus ally.
She had been brought up in a nunnery ;
For Simkin ne'er would have a wife, he said,
Unless she were well tutor'd and a maid,
To carry on his line of yeomanry :
And she was proud and pert as is a pie.
It was a pleasant thing to see these two :
On holydays before her would he go,
With his large tippet bound about his head ;
While she came after in a gown of red,
And Simkin wore his long hose of the same.
There durst no wight address her but as Dame :
None was so bold that pass'd along the way,
Who with her durst once toy or jesting play,

Unless he wish'd the sudden loss of life
Before Disdainful Simkin's sword or knife.
(For jealous folk most fierce and perilous grow ;
And this they always wish their wives to know.)
But since that to broad jokes she'd no dislike,
She was as pure as water in a dyke,
And with abuse all fill'd and froward air.
She thought that ladies should her temper bear,
Both for her kindred, and the lessons high
That had been taught her in the nunnery.

These two a fair and buxom daughter had,
Of twenty years ; no more since they were wed,
Saving a child, that was but six months old ;
A little boy in cradle rocked and rolled.
This daughter was a stout and well-grown lass,
With broad flat nose, and eyes as grey as glass.
Broad were her hips ; her bosom round and high ;
But right fair was she here—I will not lie.

The rector of the town, as she was fair,
A purpose had to make her his sole heir,
Both of his cattle and his tenement ;
But only if she married as he meant.
It was his purpose to bestow her high,

Into some worthy blood of ancestry :
For holy church's good must be expended
On holy church's blood that is descended ;
Therefore he would his holy church honour,
Although that holy church he should devour.

Great toll and fee had Simkin, out of doubt,
With wheat and malt, of all the land about,
And in especial was the Soler Hall—
A college great at Cambridge thus they call—
Which at this mill both wheat and malt had ground.
And on a day it suddenly was found,
Sick lay the Manciple of a malady ;
And men for certain thought that he must die.
Whereon this Miller both of corn and meal
An hundred times more than before did steal ;
For, ere this chance, he stole but courteously,
But now he was a thief outrageously.
The warden scolded with an angry air ;
But this the Miller rated not a tare :
He sang high bass, and swore it was not so !

There were two scholars young, and poor, I trow,
That dwelt within the Hall of which I say.
Headstrong they were and lusty for to play ;

And merely for their mirth and revelry,
Out to the warden eagerly they cry,
That he should let them, for a merry round,
Go to the mill, and see their own corn ground,
And each would fair and boldly lay his neck
The Miller should not steal them half a peck
Of corn by sleight, nor by main force bereave.

And at the last the warden gave them leave :
One was call'd John, and Allen named the other ;
From the same town they came, which was called
Strauther,
Far in the North—I cannot tell you where.

This Allen maketh ready all his gear,
And on a horse the sack he cast anon :
Forth go these merry clerks, Allen and John,
With good sword and with buckler by their side.
John knew the way, and needed not a guide ;
And at the mill the sack adown he layeth.

Allen spake first :—‘ Simon, all hail ! in faith,
How fares thy daughter, and thy worthy wife ?’

‘ Allen,’ quoth Simkin, ‘ welcome, by my life ;

And also John :—how now ! what do ye here ?'
' Simon,' quoth John, ' compulsion has no peer.
They who've nae lackeys must themselves bestir,
Or else they are but fools, as clerks aver.
Our Manciple I think will soon be dead,
Sae slowly work the grinders in his head ;
And therefore am I come with Allen thus,
To grind our corn, and carry it hame with us :
I pray you speed us, that we may be gone.'

Quoth Simkin, ' By my faith it shall be done ;
What will ye do, while that it is in hand ?'
' Gude's life ! right by the hopper will I stand,'
(Quoth John,) ' and see how that the corn goes in.
I never yet saw, by my father's kin,
How that the hopper waggles to and fro.'

Allen continued,—' John, and wilt thou so ?
Then will I be beneath it, by my crown,
And see how that the meal comes running down
Into the trough—and that shall be my sport.
For, John, like you, I'm of the curious sort ;
And quite as bad a miller—so let's see !'

This Miller smiled at their 'cute nicety,

And thought,—all this is done but for a wile ;
They fancy that no man can them beguile :
But, by my thrift, I'll dust their searching eye,
For all the sleights in their philosophy.
The more quaint knacks and guarded plans they make,
The more corn will I steal when once I take :
Instead of flour, I'll leave them nought but bran :
The greatest clerks are not the wisest men.
As whilom to the wolf thus spake the mare :
Of all their art I do not count a tare.

Out at the door he goeth full privily,
When that he saw his time, and noiselessly :
He looketh up and down, till he hath found
The clerks' bay horse, where he was standing bound
Under an ivy wall, behind the mill :
And to the horse he goeth him fair and well,
And strippeth off the bridle in a trice.

And when the horse was loose he 'gan to race
Unto the wild mares wandering in the fen,
With *wehee ! whinny !* right through thick and thin !
This Miller then return'd ; no word he said,
But doth his work, and with these clerks he play'd,
Till that their corn was well and fairly ground.

And when the meal is sack'd and safely bound,
John goeth out, and found his horse was gone,
And cried aloud with many a stamp and groan,
' Our horse is lost ! Allen, od's banes ! I say,
Up on thy feet !—come off, man—up, away !
Alas ! our warden's palfrey, it is gone !'

Allen at once forgot both meal and corn—
Out of his mind went all his husbandry—
' What !—whilk way is he gone ?' he 'gan to cry.

The Miller's wife came laughing inwardly,
' Alas !' said she, ' your horse i' the fens doth fly
After wild mares as fast as he can go !
Ill luck betide the hand that bound him so,
And his that better should have knit the rein.'

' Alas !' quoth John, ' good Allen, haste amain ;
Lay down thy sword, as I will mine alsó ;
Heaven knoweth I am as nimble as a roe ;
He shall not 'scape us baith, or my saul's dead !
Why didst not put the horse within the shed ?
By the mass, Allen, thou'rt a fool, I say !'

Those silly clerks have scamper'd fast away

Unto the fen ; Allen and nimble John :
And when the Miller saw that they were gone,
He half a bushel of their flour doth take,
And bade his wife go knead it in a cake.
He said, ' I trow these clerks fear'd what they've found ;
Yet can a miller turn a scholar round
For all his art. Yea, let them go their way !
See where they run ! yea, let the children play :
They get him not so lightly, by my crown.'

The simple clerks go running up and down,
With ' Soft, soft !—stand, stand !—hither !—back !—
take care !—

Now whistle thou, and I shall keep him here !
But, to be brief, until the very night
They could not, though they tried with all their might,
The palfrey catch ; he always ran so fast :
Till in a ditch they caught him at the last.

Weary and wet as beasts amid the rain,
Allen and John come slowly back again.
' Alas,' quoth John, ' that ever I was born !
Now are we turn'd into contempt and scorn.
Our corn is stolen ; fools they will us call ;
The warden, and our college fellows all,

And 'specially the Miller—'las the day !'

Thus plaineth John while going by the way
Toward the mill, the bay nag in his hand.
The Miller sitting by the fire they found,
For it was night : no further could they move ;
But they besought him, for heaven's holy love,
Lodgment and food to give them for their penny.

And Simkin answered, ' If that there be any,
Such as it is, yet shall ye have your part.
My house is small, but ye have learned art ;
Ye can, by arguments, well make a place
A mile broad, out of twenty foot of space !
Let's see now if this place, as 'tis, suffice ;
Or, make more room with speech, as is your guise.'
' Now, Simon, by Saint Cuthbert,' said this John,
' Thou'rt ever merry, and that's answer'd soon.
I've heard that man must needs choose o' twa things ;
Such as he finds, or else such as he brings.
But specially I pray thee, mine host dear,
Let us have meat and drink, and make us cheer,
And we shall pay you to the full, be sure :
With empty hand men may na' hawks allure.
Lo ! here's our siller ready to be spent !'

The Miller to the town his daughter sent
For ale and bread, and roasted them a goose ;
And bound their horse ; he should no more get loose ;
And in his own room made for them a bed,
With blankets, sheets, and coverlet well spread :
Not twelve feet from his own bed did it stand.
His daughter, by herself, as it was plann'd,
In a small passage closet, slept close by :
It might no better be, for reasons why,—
There was no wider chamber in the place.
They sup, and jest, and show a merry face,
And drink of ale, the strongest and the best.
It was just midnight when they went to rest.

Well hath this Simkin varnish'd his hot head ;
Full pale he was with drinking, and nought red.
He hiccougheth, and speaketh through the nose,
As with the worst of colds, or quinsy's throes.
To bed he goeth, and with him trips his wife ;
Light as a jay, and jolly seem'd her life,
So was her jolly whistle well ywet.
The cradle at her bed's foot close she set
To rock, or nurse the infant in the night.
And when the jug of ale was emptied quite,
To bed, likewise, the daughter went anon :

To bed goes Allen ; with him also John.
All's said : they need no drugs from poppies pale.
This Miller hath so wisely bibbed of ale,
But as an horse he snorteth in his sleep,
And blurteth secrets which awake he'd keep.
His wife a burden bare him, and full strong :
Men might their routing hear a good furlóng.
The daughter routeth eke, *par compagnie*.

Allen, the clerk, that heard this melody,
Now poketh John, and said, ' Why sleepest thou ?
Heardest thou ever sic a song e'er now ?
Lo, what a serenade's among them all !
A wild-fire red upon their bodies fall !
Wha ever listened to sae strange a thing ?
The flower of evil shall their ending bring.
This whole night there to me betides no rest.
But, courage yet, all shall be for the best ;
For, John,' said he, ' as I may ever thrive,
To pipe a merrier serenade I'll strive
In the dark passage somewhere near to us ;
For, John, there is a law which sayeth thus,—
That if a man in one point be aggrieved,
Right in another he shall be relieved :
Our corn is stolen—sad yet sooth to say—

And we have had an evil bout to-day ;
But since the Miller no amends will make,
Against our loss we should some payment take.
His sonsie daughter will I seek to win,
And get our meal back—deil reward his sin !
By hallow-mass it shall no otherwise be !'

But John replied, ' Allen, well counsel thee :
The miller is a perilous man,' he said,
' And if he wake and start up from his bed,
He may do both of us a villany.'
' Nay,' Allen said, ' I count him not a flie !'
And up he rose, and crept along the floor
Into the passage humming with their snore :
As narrow was it as a drum or tub.
And like a beetle doth he grope and grub,
Feeling his way with darkness in his hands,
Till at the passage end he stooping stands.

John lieth still, and not far off, I trow,
And to himself he maketh ruth and woe.
' Alas,' quoth he, ' this is a wicked jape !
Now may I say that I am but an ape.
Allen may somewhat quit him for his wrong :
Already can I hear his plaint and song ;

So shall his 'venture happily be sped,
While like a rubbish-sack I lie in bed ;
And when this jape is told another day,
I shall be call'd a fool, or a cokenáy !
I will adventure somewhat, too, in faith :
“ Weak heart, worse fortune,” as the proverb saith.'

And up he rose at once, and softly went
Unto the cradle, as 'twas his intent,
And to his bed's foot bare it, with the brat.
The wife her routing ceased soon after that,
And woke, and left her bed ; for she was pained
With night-mare dreams of skies that madly rained.
Eastern astrologers and clerks, I wis,
In time of Apis tell of storms like this.
Awhile she stayed, and waxeth calm in mind ;
Returning then, no cradle doth she find,
And gropeth here and there—but she found none.
' Alas,' quoth she, ' I had almost misgone !
I well-nigh stumbled on the clerks a-bed :
Eh benedicite ! but I am safely sped.
And on she went, till she the cradle found,
While through the dark still groping with her hand.

Meantime was heard the beating of a wing,

And then the third cock of the morn 'gan sing.
Allen stole back, and thought 'ere that it dawn
I will creep in by John that lieth forlorn.'
He found the cradle in his hand, anon.
'Gude Lord!' thought Allen, 'all wrong have I gone!
My head is dizzy with the ale last night,
And eke my piping, that I go not right.
Wrong am I, by the cradle well I know:
Here lieth Simkin, and his wife alsó.'
And, scrambling forthright on, he made his way
Unto the bed where Simkin snoring lay!
He thought to nestle by his fellow John,
And by the Miller in he crept, anon,
And caught him by the neck, and 'gan to shake,
And said, 'Thou John! thou swine's head dull, awake!
Wake, by the mass! and hear a noble game,
For, by St. Andrew! to thy ruth and shame,
I have been trolling roundelays this night,
And won the Miller's daughter's heart outright,
Who hath me told where hidden is our meal:
All this—and more—and how they always steal;
While thou hast as a coward lain aghast!'

'Thou slanderous ribald!' quoth the Miller, 'hast?
A traitor false, false lying clerk!' quoth he,

‘Thou shalt be slain by heaven’s dignity,
Who rudely dar’st disparage with foul lie
My daughter that is come of lineage high !’
And by the throat he Allen grasp’d amain ;
And caught him, yet more furiously, again,
And on his nose he smote him with his fist !
Down ran the bloody stream upon his breast,
And on the floor they tumble, heel and crown,
And shake the house—it seem’d all coming down.
And up they rise, and down again they roll ;
Till that the Miller, stumbling o’er a coal,
Went plunging headlong like a bull at bait,
And met his wife, and both fell flat as slate.
‘Help, holy cross of Bromeholm !’ loud she cried,
‘And, all ye martyrs, fight upon my side !
In manus tuas—help !—on thee I call !
Simon, awake ! the fiend on me doth fall :
He crusheth me—help !—I am well-nigh dead ;
He lieth along my heart, and heels, and head.
Help, Simkin ! for the false clerks rage and fight !’

Now sprang up John as fast as ever he might,
And graspeth by the dark walls to and fro
To find a staff : the wife starts up alsó.
She knew the place far better than this John,

And by the wall she caught a staff anon.
She saw a little shimmering of a light,
For at an hole in shone the moon all bright,
And by that gleam she saw the struggling two,
But knew not, as for certain, who was who,
Save that she saw a white thing in her eye.
And when that she this white thing 'gan espy,
She thought that Allen did a night-cap wear,
And with the staff she drew near, and more near,
And, thinking 'twas the clerk, she smote at full
Disdainful Simkin on his bald ape's skull.
Down goes the Miller, crying ' Harow, I die !'
These clerks they beat him well, and let him lie.
They make them ready, and take their horse anon,
And eke their meal, and on their way are gone ;
And from behind the mill-door took their cake,
Of half a bushel of flour—a right good bake.



THE
FLOWER AND THE LEAF;

MODERNIZED

By THOMAS POWELL.

THE ARGUMENT.

A GENTLEWOMAN, out of an arbour, in a grove, seeth a great company of knights and ladies in a dance upon the green grass ; the which being ended, they all kneel down, and do honour to the Daisy,—some to the Flower, and some to the Leaf. Afterward, this Gentlewoman learneth, by one of these Ladies, the meaning thereof, which is this :—*They which honour the Flower, a thing fading with every blast, are such as look after beauty and worldly pleasures ; but they that honour the Leaf, which abideth with the root, notwithstanding the frost and winter storms, are they which follow virtue and enduring qualities without regard of worldly prospects.*

THE
FLOWER AND THE LEAF.

1.

WHEN Phœbus bright his chair of gold so high
Had whirléd up the starry sky aloft,
And in the Bull was entered certainly ;
When sweetest showers of rain descending soft,
Had caused the ground full many a time and oft
To breathe around a fresh and wholesome air,
And every dewy plain was clothed fair

2.

With newest green ; and bright and little flowers
Sprung here and there in every field and mead ;
So very good and wholesome be the showers,
That they renew whate'er was old or dead
In winter time, and out of every seed
Bursteth the herb, so that each living wight
In this fresh season waxeth glad and light ;

3.

And I rejoicing in this season sweet,
Was happéd thus ; upon a certain night,
As on my bed I lay, for sleep unmeet,
Weary yet restless ;—but wherefore I might
Not sleep, I wist not ; for no living wight,
As I suppose, had more of heart-felt ease,
For I had neither sorrow nor disease ;

4.

Wherefore, I marvel greatly at myself,
That for so long a time I sleepless lay :
And up I rose at three hours after twelve,
About the springing of the gladsome day,
And on I put my gear and mine array,
And to a pleasant grove my footsteps bent
Long ere the sun had lit the firmament.

5.

And in this grove stood great oaks in a line,
Under the which the grass, so fresh of hue,
Was newly sprung ; and, some eight feet or nine
Apart, each tree from his tall fellow grew,
With branches broad, laden with foliage new,
Which had sprung out to welcome the Sun sheen,—
Some very red, and some a glad light green.

6.

Which as methought was a right pleasant sight ;
And eke the birds' songs in the trees to hear,
Would have rejoicéd any earthly wight ;
And I who could not yet hope any where
To hear the nightingale through all the year,
Now hearkened busily with heart and ear
If I could catch her voice far off or near.

7.

At length a path of little width, indeed,
I found, that greatly had not used been,
For it was overgrown with grass and weed,
So that by many a wight it was not seen :—
Thought I, this path must lead somewhere, I ween ;
And so I followed on till me it brought
To a right pleasant Bower with cunning wrought.

8.

Soft seats were all around with green turfs new,
Just freshly turfed ; and, lo ! the pleasant grass
So small, so thick, so short, so fresh of hue,
That most like to green wool, I wot, it was ;
And eke the hedge that round about it grew
Was full of flowers. It was a gentle bower
Woven with eglantine and sycamour.

9.

And it was wreathed around so cunningly,
That every branch and flower grew forth by measure
Smooth as a board, and growing just so high
As seemed nearest to the maker's pleasure :
It was of pleasant bowers the veriest treasure,
So that all men must say that had it seen,
It passéd all the bowers that e'er had been.

10.

Well shapen was this arbour's roof withal,
And as a little parlour wrought, also
The hedge was thick as is a castle wall ;
So that who list without to stand or go,
Though he would all the day pry to and fro,
He could not see if there were any wight
Within or not ; but one within well might

11.

Perceive all those that travelled there without
Into the field that was on every side
Covered with corn or grass, that out of doubt,
Though one should seek thro' all the world so wide,
So fair a meadow could not be espied
In any Eastern clime, nor any where,
For it was full of all things good and fair.

12.

And I, that all this pleasant sight did see,
Thought suddenly, I felt so sweet an air
Breathe from the Eglantine, that certainly
There is no heart, I deem, in such despair,
Nor with dark thoughts of weariness and care
So overlaid, but it would straight have ease
Could it but feel such gentle airs as these.

13.

And as I stood and cast mine eyes around,
I saw, I ween, the fairest medlar tree,
That ever was in field or forest found,
As full of blossoms as it well could be ;
Therein a goldfinch leapéd prettily
From bough to bough, and as he list, did eat
Now here and there of buds and flowers sweet.

14.

This fragrant tree was near the arbour's side,
Of which I spake ; and when this golden bird
His hunger had with blossoms satisfied,
He then began to sing ;—I never heard
Warblings so passing sweet, no honeyed word
Whispered from maiden's tongue could e'er compare
With the sweet music which now filled the air.

15.

And then the nightingale to answer him,
Poured forth a flood of merry song ; the wood
Stirred with the echoes of this glorious hymn ;
As one o'ercome with wonderment I stood
So long entranced that, do whate'er I could,
I wist not where I was, for far and near
Still thrilled this heavenly music in mine ear.

16.

At length I 'gan to look on every side
Most busily, that I this bird might see,
And all upon a sudden I espied
Where she was sitting in a laurel tree,
Upon the farther side and close by me,
That gave so passing a delicious smell,
Accordant to the eglantine full well.

17.

Wherein I had so exquisite a pleasure,
That as methought I sure entrancéd was,
And lulled in Paradise ; no deeper measure
Of bliss could be, nor ever hope to pass
Beyond that day ; and so upon the grass
I laid myself that I might easier hear
This bird's fresh song, Nature's sweet chorister.

18.

More pleasant far to me, by many fold,
Than meat or drink, or any other thing,—
The dewy arbour was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome fragrance eke so comforting,
That as I deemed, since Time first stirred his wing
To starry songs when this bright world began,
This was the sweetest spot for mortal man.

19.

And as I sat intent upon the bird,
Methought that there came voices suddenly,
The sweetest voices mortal ever heard,
Stealing upon the ear deliciously,
Tuned to all sweet accord and harmony,
So that they seeméd far too sweet for earth,
And more like voices of an angel-birth.

20.

At length out of a shady grove close by,
That was right beautiful and fair to sight,
Came tripping forth and singing lustily,
A world of ladies ; but to tell aright
Their matchless beauty is beyond my might,
Or their array, but ne'ertheless I shall
Tell of a part, tho' I speak not of all.

21.

In vestments made of glossy velvet white,
And deftly fitting, they were clad each one.
From down their vestures' seams a streak of light
From studded emeralds and rubies shone,
Most glorious to behold ; and many a stone
Was o'er the other parts : like dew-'sprent leaves,
Glistened their trains and boddices and sleeves.

22.

And lustrous pearls, large, round, and orient,
Diamonds all bright, and rubies fiery red,
And other gems their various colours blent ;
While to crown all, upon each lady's head
Was a rich band of gold, which, be it said,
Was set with stately stones : and wisely meet,
Each one a chaplet had, a garland sweet,

23.

Upon her brow, of branches fresh and green,
So very curiously and fairly wrought,
It was a sight most pleasing to be seen.
Some were of laurel, some had, as methought,
Chaplets of cheerful woodbine, and some brought
Wreaths of pure *agnus castus* ; but all round
Without a garland green there was no lady found.

24.

Some danced, and others sung full tenderly,
And they all went in slow and measured grace ;
But there walked one amid the company
Sole by herself, while all observed the pace
That she kept to ; her heavenly-figured face
So gracious was, that in her beauty she
Surpassed the loveliest of the company.

25.

And she was richer dight by many fold,
And loftier seemed in one and every thing ;
Upon her head was, glorious to behold,
A crown of gold, more fitting for a king ;
A branch of *agnus castus* did she bring
In her pale fingers ; as I saw her stand,
She seemed the lady queen of this fair band.

26.

And she a roundelay 'gan lustily,
Sing "*Sus le foyle de vert moy*" men do call,
"*Sine et mon joly cœur est endormy ;*"
And then the ladies answered one and all,
With voices sweet entuned, and eke so small,
That as methought it was the sweetest song
That I had listened to my whole life long.

27.

And thus they came, and sung and laughed and danced,
Into the middle of the field where I
Within the arbour was ; and thus it chanced,
Me thought I was well placéd to espy
Which was the fairest of the company,
Who best could dance, or speak, or smile, or sing,
And who most womanly in every thing.

28.

While thus they danced upon this meadow ground,
I heard, as tho' far off, right suddenly,
So loud a noise of thundering trumpets sound,
It seemed as tho' it would have shook the sky ;
Soon after this it was my lot to spy
A troop of knights come from the grove whence came
The gentle ladies with their queenly dame.

29.

So numerous was this troop, it seemed as tho'
All living men on earth had been assembled,
Mounted on noble steeds, and as they go,
Prancing across the plain, the whole earth trembled ;
Their rich array of gold and gems resembled
A gorgeous pageant, beyond count or measure,
And far transcending every kingly treasure.

30.

Of their array who wishes to hear more,
I will rehearse according to my might :
First issued from the grove oft named before,
To lead the way, in cloaks of velvet white,
A company, that wore for their delight
Chaplets just gathered from the old oak-trees,
And smelling of the woods and morning breeze.

31.

And they had trumpets each with banner bound
Of finest silk, most richly wrought and fair ;
And on each trumpet was its lord's arms found,
Worked on the neck, with jewels rich and rare,
On collars broad ; for cost they did not spare.
Rich crowns were on their regal scutcheons placed,
With sapphires, diamonds, pearls, and rubies graced.

32.

Their steeds' caparisons were also white,
And after these rode forth a goodly band
Of kings-at-arms, in richest armour dight.
They seemed the chivalry of some fair land :
Their lofty brows by the oak chaplets spanned,
Glittered with noble thoughts, and their proud gaze
Dimmed the pale splendour of their jewels' blaze.

33.

And they rode forth so glorious in array,
So mannerly, and full of gentle grace,
That every tongue would be compelled to say
They were the noblest of a noble race ;
And all their prancing steeds kept even pace,
So that no eye, however keen, could see
A blemish in this noble company.

34.

Heralds and pursuivants next came arrayed,
Like to the knights in cloaks of velvet white,
And certainly it must of them be said,
That but to look at these was great delight.
Chaplets of oak had they, and like each knight
Their horse-gear was : escutcheons proud they bore,
In fashion like to those who rode before.

35.

Next after these there rode in armour bright,
All save their heads, of graceful warriors nine,
And every clasp and nail were, to my sight,
(Of their array) made of the red gold fine.
With cloth of gold, furred o'er with rich ermine,
The horses' trappings too were full and round :
And eke so long, they hung nigh to the ground.

36.

The bosses of their bridles gleamed with rows
Of pearls, each worth a thousand pounds I ween ;
And twining gracefully around their brows
Were glorious chaplets of the laurel green,
The deftest made that I have ever seen ;
And to each knight three henchmen were assigned,
Who rode at proper distances behind.

37.

The first of these on a short truncheon bore
The helmet of his lord, so richly dight,
That e'en the worst of them, I ween, was more
Than a king's ransom ; and a broad shield bright
The second carried ; the third bare upright
A mighty spear, of point full sharp and keen ;
And every henchman had a chaplet green.

38.

These like their lords in velvet were arrayed,
And like their lords their steeds were trapp'd alsó,
And after them there rode across the mead
Knight after knight, in many a goodly row,
Mounted on coursers proud that seemed to know
The valour of their lords ; so numerous they
That all the field was spread with their array.

39.

And they were crown'd also in their degrees
With chaplets new, some made of laurel green,
And some of oak, and some of other trees ;
Some in their hands bore boughs of golden sheen ;
With laurel some, with oak boughs some were seen ;
Of woodbine some, some of the hawthorn kind ;
And many more which I have not in mind.

40.

And so they rode and roused their noble steeds,
Stirring their blood with sound of trumpets loud,
And I felt stirred myself to gallant deeds
By the appearance of these knights so proud :
Then at the last, as even as they could,
They took their place in middle of the mead,
And every knight then turned his horse's head

41.

Round to his fellow knight, and put his spear
Into its rest, and so the jousts began
In all parts of the field ; some there, some here ;
Some broke their spears, some threw both horse and man :
About the field astray the horses ran.
To see this noble pageant ruled so well,
Was greater pleasure than my verse can tell.

42.

And when the joust had been an hour or more,
The knights that crownéd were in laurel green,
Did win the prize ; their blows were dealt so sore,
That none their force and valour could sustain,
And so the jousting all was left off clean.
Then from their steeds the victors nine alight,
And after them their compeers in the fight.

43.

And forth they went together, twain and twain,
That to behold it was a worthy sight,
Towards the ladies on the verdant plain,
That sung and danced, as I said now aright.
The ladies, soon as they with honour might,
Broke off the song and dance, and went to meet
These warrior knights, and with sweet tokens greet.

44.

Then every lady took full womanly
By her fair hand a knight, and forth they went
Unto a laurel tree that stood close by,
With greenest leaves and boughs of broad extent ;
And, in my judgment, this fair tree was meant
To be the lord of every goodly tree,
For underneath its branches there might be,

45.

An hundred persons shadowed from the heat,
When Phœbus is most glorious and bright ;
It seeméd formed to be a safe retreat
From rain or hail, or baneful dews of night,
And the cool shade did every heart delight,
So that the saddest man that e'er could be,
Must cheerful feel when 'neath this spreading tree.

46.

And, with great reverence, they inclinéd low
Unto the tree so fair and sweet of hue ;
And, after they had paused some time or so,
They all 'gan sing, and dance some dances new.
Some sang of love, some mourned of love untrue.
Around the tree at length they stood upright,
And every gentle lady had her knight.

47.

Then at the last I turned mine eyes aside ,
And saw at once a pleasant company
That roaméd from the meadow's farthest side ;
And hand in hand a knight and dame did I
Behold afar : the ladies seemed to vie
With Eastern pomp, in what their forms were clad,
And every knight of green a mantle had,

48.

As richly broidered as the lady's were ;
And each dame had a chaplet on her head,
(Which did right well upon the shining hair)
Worked out of fragrant flow'rets white and red ;
The knights alsó, that by their hands were led,
Had chaplets made of flowers fresh and fair,
And minstrels went before with many a gentle air.

49.

Some played on harps and lutes and psaltery,
All clad in green ; wreaths on their heads they bare,
Of divers flowers, and made full craftily ;
And all alike they goodly garments wear :
So dancing onward to the mead they fare,
In midst of which a grassy turf they found,
Richly besprent with blooming flowers around.

50.

And whereunto they bowéd every one
With gentle grace, and very reverently,
And at the last there then began anon
A sweet-voiced dame to sing right womanly
The Daisy's honour in a melody ;
For, as methought among her accents sweet,
She warbled, "*Si douce est la Margarete* * !"

* The burden of the Pastoral Song in honour of the Daisy.

51.

Then they all answered her, and, to mine ear,
So passing well, and eke so pleasantly,
That a most blissful song it was to hear :—
But how it happed I know not—suddenly,
Just as the noontide sun so fervently
Shone on them with his beams, the tender flowers
Lost all the beauty of their morning hours.

52.

And shrunk with heat the ladies also felt,
So that they wist not where their heads to shade ;
And eke the knights themselves began to melt
Beneath the sultry sun, and quite dismayed
They seemed to stand : then o'er the spacious mead
The wind began so sturdily to blow,
That all the gentle flowers were soon laid low,

53.

Save a choice few, who, hid among the leaves,
Were sheltered from the blasts that did assail
These fragile things ; and then at last there raves
A fearful tempest of thick driving hail,
With rushing rain borne on the wingéd gale,
Which revelled in the storm—so thick it came,
That drenched with water was each knight and dame.

54.

And when the tempest had all passed away,
Those in the white, who stood beneath the tree,
And who had nothing felt of the affray,
That had on those in green dashed furiously,
Went forth to offer them sweet sympathy,
And they so gentle were that they were glad
To comfort at all times the sick and sad.

55.

Then was I 'ware why one of them in green
Had on a crown so richly gem-bedight ;
Wherefore I deemed full well she was a queen,
And those around her did her service right ;
Then the fair ladies that were clad in white,
Went forth to meet them, and the knights also
Spoke pleasantly to cheer away their woe.

56.

The queen in white, who was most wondrous fair,
Took by the hand the queenly dame in green,
And said, " Dear sister, much my heart doth share
The wretched plight, so cold and unserene,
Wherein you and your company have been,
So long, alas ! but, sister, come with me,
And I will comfort you right tenderly."

57.

And then the other queen to this replied,
In very humbleness, as well she might,
With gentle words devoid of foolish pride,
For she was in a very perilous plight :
And then each lady that was clad in white,
Took by the hand a lady clad in green,
Which when the knights who stood around had seen,

58.

They in like manner took a fellow-knight,
And forth with them they walked in gentle show
Unto a hedge, a little on the right,
And then they lopped off from a goodly row
Of noble trees, which did around them grow,
Large boughs, wherewith a stately fire was made,
To dry the clothes in which they were arrayed.

59.

And, after that, of wholesome herbs that grew
Around the spot, they blisters did prepare,
And cooling ointments very good and new ;
Then to each weary knight and lady fair
They ministered with a right Christian care ;
And after that they pleasant salads brought,
Till they at length their perfect cure had wrought.

60.

The Lady of the Leaf then 'gan to pray,
Her of the Flower, (for so unto my seeming
They should be calléd after their array,)
To sup with her, and eke for any thing,
That she should with her all her people bring;
And she again with accents full and clear,
Thank'd her full kindly for her friendly cheer,

61.

And told her frankly that she would obey
With all her heart, and do whate'er she meant:
And then, without another word's delay,
The Lady of the Leaf a fair dame sent
To bring a palfrey, after her intent,
Caparisoned so richly, that I ween
No costlier harness in the world has been.

62.

And after that to all her company
She bade them steeds provide, and every thing
They stood in need of, and then lustily
Close by the arbour walked they in a string,
A goodly row, while their glad carolling
Would have rejoiced any earthly wight:
And now I saw a passing wondrous sight,

63.

For then the nightingale, that all the day
Had in the laurel sat, and did her might
To sing her welcome to the blooming May,
All suddenly began to take her flight,
And, to the Lady of the Leaf, forth right
She flew, and softly on her hand alit,
Which made me marvel as I gazed on it.

64.

The goldfinch eke, that from the medlar tree
Was fled for heat into the bushes cold,
Unto the Lady of the Flower 'gan flee,
And on her hand he set him as he would,
And pleasantly his wings began to fold ;
Then both began to sing, yea, even more,
Than they had done the live-long day before.

65.

And so these ladies rode forth a great pace,
And the whole rout of gallant knights alsó ;
Then I who had beheld this wondrous case,
Thought that I would assay full soon to know
What was the meaning of this goodly show,
And who they were that rode so pleasantly ;
So when they were the arbour passed by,

66.

I steppéd forth, and happed to meet anon
A gentle lady, fair as fair could be,
And she came riding by herself alone,
And all in white, and looking placidly.
Her I saluted with humility :
With gentle smile she turned around her head,
“ My daughter, gramercy,” she answering said.

67.

“ Madame,” quoth I, “ if that I durst enquire
Of you, I fain would of that company
That passéd by me, for I much desire
To know their purpose.” She benignantly
Said, “ My fair daughter, those who passed by
In vesture white, unto the Leaf alone,
Are faithful servants—I myself am one.

68.

Saw ye not her that crownéd was,” quoth she,
“ In spotless white ?” quoth I, “ Fair lady, yes.”
“ That is the goddess pure of Chastity,
Diana named, and, as she maiden is,
The branch she beareth in her hand is this—
Pure Agnus Castus, men call properly,
And all the ladies of her company,

69.

Which you saw, of that herb fresh chaplets wear,
Were such as of their maiden dower took heed ;
And all that did the laurel chaplets bear
Were such as hardy are, and strong in deed ;
Victorious names which never can be dead ;
And all so worthy are of her chaste hand,
That none in fight their prowess can withstand.

70.

And those that wear the chaplets on their head
Of woodbine fresh, are such as never were
To love untrue, in word, or thought, or deed,
But stedfast aye, fidelity their creed ;
Tho' anguish deep their living heart should tear
They never wavered, but to truth held fast,
Long as the breath did in their bodies last."

71.

"Now, madam fair," quoth I, "I still would pray
Your ladyship, if that the thing may be,
That I might hear your gentle rose-lips say,
Since it has pleaséd your benignity
The truth of these fair ladies to pourtray,
Tell me, what knights are those that I have seen
Wearing the flower, and clad in gladsome green ;

72.

And wherefore some did reverence to the tree,
And some unto the plot of flowers fair?"
"With right good-will, my daughter fair," quoth she,
Since your desire is good and debonaire,
Then learn from me :—the nine that crownéd were
Are very precious in the roll of Fame,
And the Nine Worthy Knights are called by name,

73.

Which ye may see now riding all before,
That in their time did many a noble deed,
And for their worthiness full oft have bore
The crown of laurel leaves upon their head ;
For ye may in your ancient volumes read,
That he who was as conqueror renowned
Was always with the glorious laurel crowned.

74.

And those that carried bows in their strong hands,
So notable by precious laurel bright,
Are those brave men (I'd have ye understand)
The knights of the Round Table they are hight ;
The twelve brave peers* redoutable in fight !
And they most justly bear the laurel tree,
As witness of their feats in chivalry.

* These were the Twelve Peers of France ; an order supposed to have been instituted by Charlemagne.

75.

And of the Garter there are knights alsó,
Who in their time have done right worthily,
And like the laurel tree their fame shall grow,
For ever verdant ; lauded shall they be
For martial triumphs, glorious victory,
Which unto them is wealth beyond express ;
Yea, more than any wight imagine can, or guess.

76.

For one Leaf given of that noble tree,
To any wight that worthily hath done,
(And it be done so as it ought to be,)
Is honour greater than all 'neath the sun :—
Witness the Roman, who in knighthood shone,
The noble founder of all gallant deed ;
As ye may in old Titus Livius read.

77.

And she that's crowned with wreath of freshest green
Is Flora, goddess of all pleasant flowers ;
And all that have on her attending been
Are idle folk, that love to spend the hours
Free from all busy cares in sylvan bowers,
And eke to hunt, and hawk, and play in meads,
And many other such like idle deeds.

78.

And for the great delight and passion strong
They cherish for the Flower in such degree,
They unto it in reverent worship throng,
As ye may see." "Now, madam fair," quoth I,
"If I durst ask, what is the cause, and why,
The knights consider as the symbol chief
Of honour, not the Flower, but the Leaf?"

79.

"In sooth, my daughter fair, this is the truth,
For persevering every knight should be
In glory's chace; from cunning clear, and sloth;
From well to better rising by degree;
In sign of which these laurel Leaves we see
For ever fresh; for every one doth know
That laurel Leaves through every season grow,

80.

And keep their beauty always bright and green;
For there's no tempest that can them deface,
Nor hail, nor snow, nor winds, nor frosts so keen;
Therefore they have this property and grace:—
As for the Flower, within a little space
Its bloom decays, so tender is its kind,
That it endures nor hail, nor rain, nor wind.

81.

And every storm will blow them soon away,
So that they last not for one little year ;
That is the cause, the very truth to say,
That they may not (is not the reason clear ?)
Be placed in honour's noblest service here."
"Madame," quoth I, "with all mine earnest heart,
I thank you now for what you thus impart ;

82.

For now I have most truly ascertained
All the hard things that I desired to know."
"Right glad am I," quoth she, "to have explained
Aught to your pleasure, if you will me trow ;
Now tell me truly, where will you bestow
Your service henceforth, from this very hour ;
Tell me I pray—unto the Leaf, or Flower ?"

83.

"Madam, tho' most unworthy," thus quoth I,
"Of such a service, to the Leaf I bow."
"That is," quoth she, "done well, right certainly :
And I pray God to keep you in your vow
In full remembrance, to all time from now,—
And eke from Malabouche*, whose cruelty
Is dealt to all that fair and virtuous be.

* Malabouch signifies Calumny: thus in the translation of Alain Chartier's

84.

But here no longer may I now abide,
For I must follow the great company,
That ye may yonder see before me ride."
I therefore took, in all humility,
My leave of her, and she did quickly hie
After their steps as fast as e'er she might,
While I drew homewards, for 'twas nearly night;

85.

And put in writing all that I had seen,
Under support of those who wish to read.
O little Book, of knowledge all so mean,
How durst thou put thyself in press for dread?
It is a wonder that thou wax not red,
Since that thou little know'st who will behold
Thy language rude, thy tale full roughly told!

EXPLICIT.

"La belle dame sans mercy," ver. 741, Edition Urry, we read:—

"Malebouch in court hath grete commaundement;
Eche mun studieth to say the worse he maie."



THE FRIAR'S TALE ;

MODERNIZED

By LEIGH HUNT.



THE FRIAR'S TALE;

OR,

THE SUMNER AND THE DEVIL*.

THERE liv'd, Sirs, in my country, formerly,
A wondrous great Archdeacon,—who but he?
Who boldly did the work of his high station
In punishing improper conversation,

* “A *Sompnour* and the Devil meeting on the way, after conference become sworn brethren, and to hell they go together. A covert invective against the bribery and corruption of the spiritual courts in those days.” *The old commentator*, URRY.

Sompnour is Summoner. The word survives to this day in the proper name, SUMNER; after which mode it has accordingly been spelt in the version here ventured. It was the business of his office to summon delinquents to *appear* in ecclesiastical courts, for which reason the Summoner is now called an Apparitor.

The reader will bear in mind that there was great jealousy between the friars and the other religious orders; hence the bitterness of anti-clerical invective put into the friar's mouth, and the unseemly personalities between him and the spiritual officer.

And all the slidings thereunto belonging ;
Witchcraft, and scandal also, and the wronging
Of holy Church, by blinking of her dues
In sacraments and contracts, wills and pews ;
Usury furthermore, and simony ;
But people of ill lives most loathéd he :
Lord ! how he made them sing if they were caught.
And tithe-defaulters, ye may guess, were taught
Never to venture on the like again ;
To the last farthing would he rack and strain.
For stinted tithes, or stinted offering,
He made the people piteously to sing.
He left no leg for the good bishop's crook ;
Down went the black sheep in his own black book ;
For when the name gat there, such dereliction
Came, you must know, Sirs, in his jurisdiction.

He had a Sumner ready to his hand ;
A slier bully filch'd not in the land ;
For in all parts the villain had his spies
To let him know where profit might arise.
Well could he spare ill livers, three or four,
To help his net to four-and-twenty more.
'Tis truth. Your Sumner may stare hard for me ;
I shall not screen, not I, his villainy ;

For heaven be thank'd, *laudetur Dominus*,
They have no hold, these cursed thieves, on us ;
Nor never shall have, let 'em thiefe till doom.

["No," cried the Sumner, starting from his gloom,
"Nor have we any hold, Sir Shaven-crown,
On your fine flock, the ladies of the town."

"Peace, with a vengeance," quoth our Host, "and let
The tale be told. Say on, thou marmoset,
Thou lady's friar, and let the Sumner sniff."]

"Well," quoth the Friar ; "this Sumner, this false
thief,

Had scouts in plenty ready to his hand,
Like any hawks, the sharpest in the land,
Watching their birds to pluck, each in his mew,
Who told him all the secrets that they knew,
And lured him game, and gat him wondrous profit ;
Exceeding little knew his master of it.

Sirs, he would go, without a writ, and take
Poor wretches up, feigning it for Christ's sake,
And threatening the poor people with his curse,
And all the while would let them fill his purse,
And to the alehouse bring him by degrees,
And then he'd drink with them, and slap his knees

For very mirth, and say 'twas some mistake.
Judas carried the bag, Sirs, for Christ's sake,
And was a thief; and such a thief was he.
His master got but sorry share, *pardie*.
To give due laud unto this Satan's imp,
He was a thief, a Sumner, and a pimp.

Wenches themselves were in his retinue;
So whether 'twas Sir Robert, or Sir Hugh,
Or Jack, or Ralph, that held the damsel dear,
Come would she then, and tell it in his ear:
Thus were the wench and he of one accord;
And he would feign a mandate from his lord,
And summon them before the court, those two,
And pluck the man, and let the mawkin go.
Then would he say, "Friend, for thine honest look,
I save thy name, this once, from the black book;
Thou hear'st no further of this case."—But, Lord!
I might not in two years his bribes record.
There's not a dog alive, so speed my soul,
Knoweth a hurt deer better from a whole
Than this false Sumner knew a tainted sheep,
Or where this wretch would skulk, or that would sleep,
Or to fleece both was more devoutly bent;
And reason good; his faith was in his rent.

And so befell, that once upon a day,
This Sumner, prowling ever for his prey,
Rode forth to cheat a poor old widow'd soul,
Feigning a cause for lack of protocole,
And as he went, he saw before him ride
A yeoman gay under the forest side.
A bow he bare, and arrows bright and keen ;
And he was clad in a short cloak of green,
And wore a hat that had a fringe of black.

“ Sir,” quoth this Sumner, shouting at his back,
“ Hail, and well met.”—“ Well met,” like shouteth he ;
“ Where ridest thou under the greenwood tree ?
Goest thou far, thou jolly boy, to-day ?”

This bully Sumner answer'd, and said, “ Nay,
Only hard-by, to strain a rent.”—“ Hoh ! hoh !
Art thou a bailiff then ?”—“ Yea, even so.”
For he durst not, for very filth and shame,
Say that he was a Sumner, for the name.

“ Well met, in God's name,” quoth black fringe ;
“ why, brother,

Thou art a bailiff then, and I'm another ;
But I'm a stranger in these parts ; so, prythee,
Lend me thine aid, and let me journey with thee.
I've gold and silver, plenty, where I dwell ;

And if thou hap'st to come into our dell,
Lord ! how we'll do our best to give thee greeting !”

“ Thanks,” quoth the Sumner ; “ merry be our meeting.”

So in each other's hand their troths they lay,
And swear accord : and forth they ride and play.

This Sumner then, which was as full of stir,
And prate, and prying, as a woodpecker,
And ever enquiring upon every thing,
Said, “ Brother, where is thine inhabiting,
In case I come to find thee out some day ?”

This yeoman dropp'd his speech in a soft way,
And said, “ Far in the north *. But ere we part,
I trow thou shalt have learnt it so by heart,
Thou may'st not miss it, be it dark as pitch.”

“ Good,” quoth the Sumner. “ Now, as thou art
rich,
Show me, dear brother, riding thus with me,
Since we are bailiffs both, some subtlety,
How I may play my game best, and may win :

* The supposed quarter of the devils.

And spare not, pray, for conscience or for sin,
But, as my brother, tell me how do ye."

"Why, 'faith, to tell thee a plain tale," quoth he,
"As to my wages, they be poor enough;
My lord's a dangerous master, hard and chuff;
And since my labour bringeth but abortion,
I live, so please ye, brother, by extortion.
I take what I can get; that is my course;
By cunning, if I may; if not, by force;
So cometh, year by year, my salary."
"Now certes," quoth the Sumner, "so fare I.
I lay my hands on every thing, God wot,
Unless it be too heavy or too hot.
What I may get in counsel, privily,
I feel no sort of qualm thereon, not I.
Extortion or starvation;—that's my creed.
Repent who list. The best of saints must feed.
That's all the stomach that my conscience knoweth.
Curse on the ass, that to confession goeth.
Well be we met, 'Od's-heart! and by my dame!
But tell me, brother dear, what is thy name?"

Now ye must know, that right in this meanwhile,
This yeoman 'gan a little for to smile.

“ Brother,” quoth he, “ my name, if I must tell—
I am a fiend : my dwelling is in hell :
And here I ride about my fortunings,
To wot if folk will give me any thing.
To that sole end ride I, and ridest thou ;
And, without pulling rein, will I ride now
To the world’s end, ere I will lose a prey.”

“ God bless me,” quoth the Sumner, “ what d’ye say ?
I thought ye were a yeoman verily.
Ye have a man’s shape, Sir, as well as I.
Have ye a shape then, pray, determinate
In hell, good Sir, where ye have your estate ?”

“ Nay, certainly,” quoth he, “ there have we none ;
But whoso liketh it, he taketh one ;
And so we make folk think us what we please.
Sometimes we go like apes, sometimes like bees,
Like man, or angel, black dog, or black crow :—
Nor is it wondrous that it should be so.
A sorry juggler can bewilder thee ;
And ’faith, I think I know more craft than he.”

“ But why,” inquir’d the Sumner, “ must ye don
So many shapes, when ye might stick to one ?”
“ We suit the bait unto the fish,” quoth he.

“ And why,” quoth t’other, “ all this slavery ?”
“ For many a cause, Sir Sumner,” quoth the fiend ;
“ But time is brief—the day will have an end ;
And here jog I, with nothing for my ride ;
Catch we our fox, and let this theme abide :
For, brother mine, thy wit it is too small
To understand me, though I told thee all ;
And yet, as toucheth that same slavery,
A dev’l must do God’s work, ’twixt you and me ;
For without him, albeit to our loathing,
Strong as we go, we devils can do nothing ;
Though to our prayers, sometimes, he giveth leave
Only the body, not the soul, to grieve.
Witness good Job, whom nothing could make wroth ;
And sometimes have we pow’r to harass both ;
And, then again, soul only is possest,
And body free ; and all is for the best.
Full many a sinner would have no salvation,
Gat it he not by standing our temptation :
Though God he knows, ’twas far from our intent
To save the man :—his howl was what we meant.
Nay, sometimes we be servants to our foes :
Witness the saint that pull’d my master’s nose ;
And to the apostle servant eke was I.”

“ Yet tell me,” quoth this Sumner, “ faithfully,
Are the new shapes ye take for your intents
Fresh every time, and wrought of elements ?”

“ Nay,” quoth the fiend, “ sometimes they be disguises ;

And sometimes in a corpse a devil rises,
And speaks as sensibly, and fair, and well,
As did the Pythoness to Samuel :
And yet will some men say, it was not he !
Lord help, say I, this world's divinity.
Of one thing make thee sure ; that thou shalt know,
Before we part, the shapes we wear below.
Thou shalt—I jest thee not—the Lord forbid !
Thou shalt know more than ever Virgil did,
Or Dante's self. So let us on, sweet brother,
And stick, like right warm souls, to one another :
I'll never quit thee, till thou quittest me.”

“ Nay,” quoth the Sumner, “ that can never be ;
I am a man well known, respectable ;
And though thou wert the very lord of hell,
Hold thee I should as mine own plighted brother :
Doubt not we'll stick right fast, each to the other :
And, as we think alike, so will we thrive :

We twain will be the merriest devils alive.
Take thou what's giv'n ; for that's thy mode, God wot ;
And I will take, whether 'tis giv'n or not.
And if that either winneth more than t'other,
Let him be true, and share it with his brother."

" Done," quoth the fiend, whose eyes in secret
glow'd ;

And with that word they prick'd along the road :
And soon it fell, that ent'ring the town's end,
To which this Sumner shap'd him for to wend,
They saw a cart that loaded was with hay,
The which a carter drove forth on his way.
Deep was the mire, and sudden the cart stuck :
The carter, like a madman, smote and struck,
And cried, " Heit, Scot ; heit, Brock ! what ! is't the
stones ?

The dev'l clean fetch ye both, body and bones :
Must I do nought but bawl and swinge all day ?
Dev'l take the whole—horse, harness, cart, and hay."

The Sumner whisper'd to the fiend, " I' faith,
We have it here. Hear'st thou not what he saith ?
Take it anon, for he hath giv'n it thee,
Live stock and dead, hay, cart, and horses three !"

“Nay,” quoth the fiend, “not so;—the deuce a bit.
He sayeth; but, alas! not meaneth it:
Ask him thyself, if thou believ’st not me;
Or else be still awhile, and thou shalt see.”

Thwacketh the man his horses on the croup,
And they begin to draw now, and to stoop.
“*Heit* there,” quoth he; “*heit, heit*; ah, *matthy wo*.
Lord love their hearts! how prettily they go!
That was well twitch’d, methinks, mine own grey boy:
I pray God save thy body, and Saint Eloy.
Now is my cart out of the slough, *pardie*.”

“There,” quoth the fiend unto the Sumner; “see,
I told thee how ’twould fall. Thou seest, dear brother,
The churl spoke one thing, but he thought another.
Let us prick on, for we take nothing here.”

And when from out the town they had got clear,
The Sumner said, “Here dwelleth an old witch,
That had as lief be tumbled in a ditch
And break her neck, as part with an old penny.
Nathless her twelve pence is as good as any,
And I will have it, though she lose her wits;
Or else I’ll cite her with a score of writs:

And yet, God wot, I know of her no vice.
So learn of me, Sir Fiend : thou art too nice."

The Sumner clappeth at the widow's gate.
"Come out," he saith, "thou hag, thou quiver-pate :
I trow thou hast some friar or priest with thee."

"Who clappeth?" said this wife ; "ah, what say ye?
God save ye, masters : what is your sweet will?"

"I have," said he, "of summons here a bill :
Take care, on pain of cursing, that thou be
To-morrow morn, before the Archdeacon's knee,
To answer to the court of certain things."

"Now, Lord," quoth she, "sweet Jesu, King of
kings,

So help me, as I cannot, Sirs, nor may :
I have been sick, and that full many a day.
I may not walk such distance, nay, nor ride,
But I be dead, so pricketh it my side.
Lo ! how I cough and quiver when I stir !—
May I not ask some worthy officer
To speak for me, to what the bill may say?"

"Yea, certainly," this Sumner said, "ye may,
On paying—let me see—twelve pence anon.

Small profit cometh to myself thereon :
My master hath the profit, and not I.
Come—twelve pence, mother—count it speedily,
And let me ride : I may no longer tarry.”

“Twelve pence!” quoth she; “now may the sweet
Saint Mary

So wisely help me out of care and sin,
As in this wide world, though I sold my skin,
I could not scrape up twelve pence, for my life.
Ye know too well I am a poor old wife :
Give alms, for the Lord's sake, to me, poor wretch.”

“Nay, if I quit thee then,” quoth he, “devil fetch
Myself, although thou starve for it, and rot.”
“Alas!” quoth she, “the pence I have 'em not.”
“Pay me,” quoth he, “or by the sweet Saint Anne,
I'll bear away thy staff and thy new pan
For the old debt thou ow'st me for that fee,
Which out of pocket I discharg'd for thee,
When thou didst make thy husband an old stag.”
“Thou liest,” quoth she; “So leave me never a rag,
As I was never yet, widow nor wife,
Summoned before your court in all my life,
Nor never of my body was untrue.

Unto the devil, rough and black of hue,
Give I thy body, and the pan to boot."

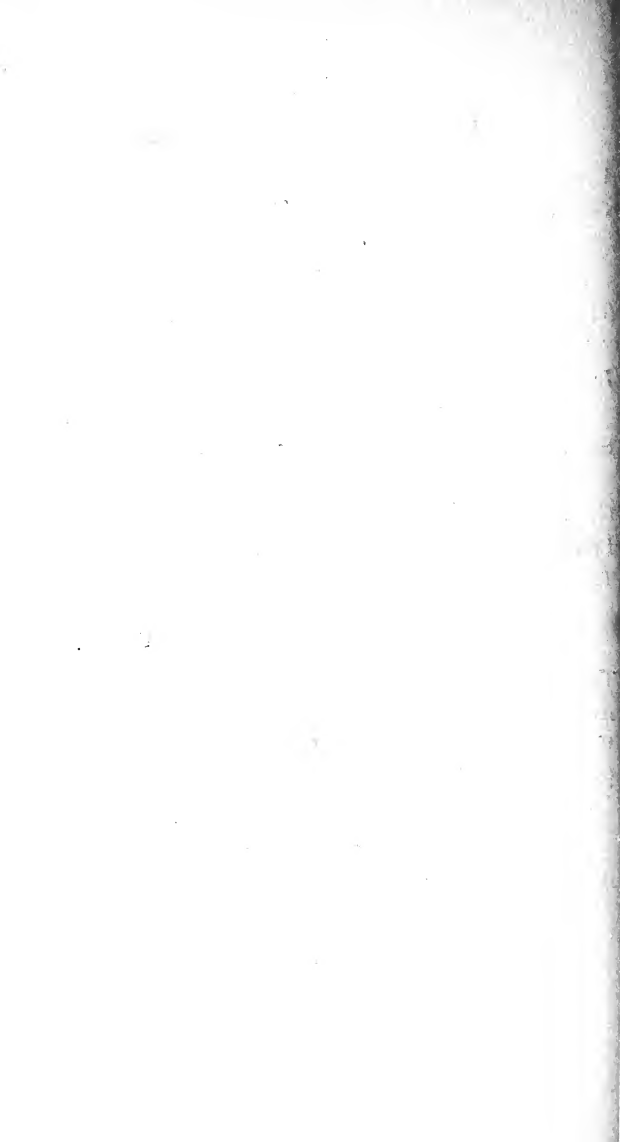
And when this devil heard her give the brute
Thus in his charge, he stoop'd into her ear,
And said, "Now, Mabily, my mother dear,
Is this your will in earnest that ye say?"

"The dev'l," quoth she, "so fetch him clean away,
Soul, pan, and all, unless that he repent."

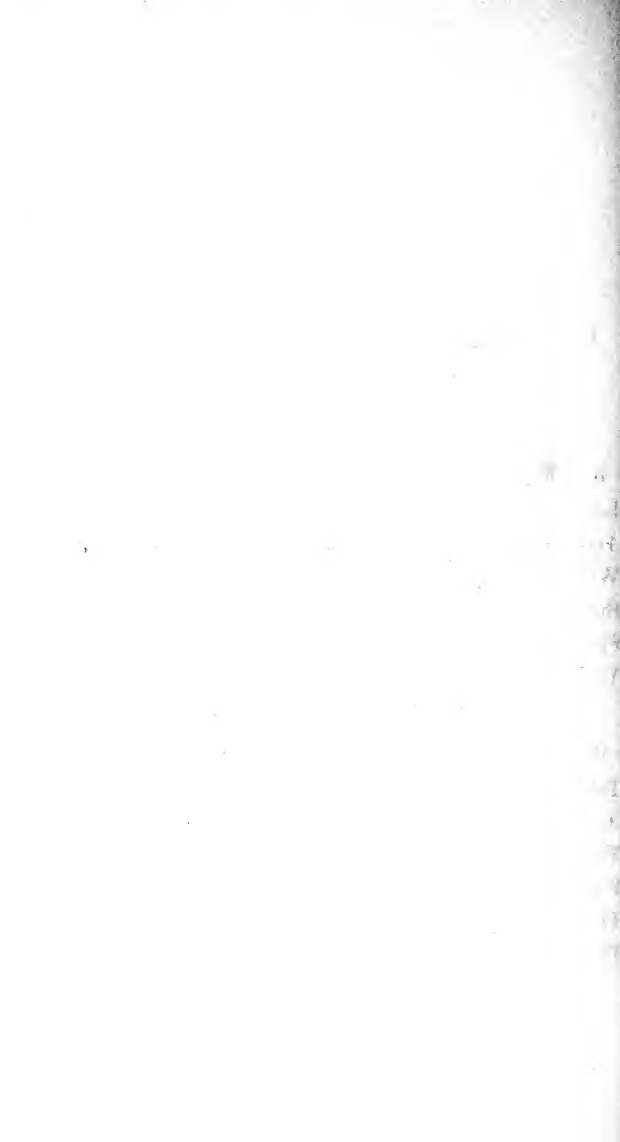
"Repent!" the Sumner cried; "pay up your rent,
Old fool; and don't stand preaching here to me.
I would I had thy whole inventory,
The smock from off thy back, and every cloth."

"Now, brother," quoth the devil, "be not wroth;
Thy body and this pan be mine by right,
And thou shalt straight to hell with me to night,
Where thou shalt know what sort of folk we be,
Better than Oxford university."

And with that word the fiend him swept below,
Body and soul. He went where Sumners go.



THE
COMPLAINT OF MARS AND VENUS
MODERNIZED
By ROBERT BELL.



PROLOGUE

TO THE

COMPLAINT OF MARS AND VENUS.

1.

‘ REJOICE, ye lovers, in the morning gray !
Lo, Venus rises in the whispering reeds ;
And flowers renew your homage to the day,
Waking in beauty o’er the upland meads :
But ye, whose trembling passion vainly pleads,
Fly hence in fear, lest wicked tongues be nigh—
Yonder’s the Sun—the torch of jealousy !

2.

‘ With falling tears, and with a wounded heart,
Take your sad leave ; but hope from patience borrow,
And let the knowledge soothe your aching smart,
That a time cometh which shall end your sorrow ;
For the glad night is worth a heavy morrow.’
Thus sang a bird, Saint Valentine, what time,
Thy natal day was in its early prime.

3.

‘Yet,’ sang this bird, ‘I counsel every one
To chaste fidelity ; ye who repent
The ambitious choice ye’ve set your hearts upon,
Renew your service ere the day is spent ;
And ye who’ve chosen to your hearts’ content,
Confirm your choice in perpetuity,
And wait upon the issue patiently.

4.

‘And, for the grace of this high festival,
Will I, bird-fashion, sing the sad Complaint
Of lusty Mars, and how one morn it fell
That sorrowing from Venus’ side he went,
Like one with sudden grief and frenzy rent,
When Phœbus rose upon the lovers’ sight,
Searching all places with his fiery light.

5.

‘Whilome the three celestial lords above
’Tis said, in course of heavenly progression,
As by desert, had won fair Venus’ love ;
And she hath now brought Mars to such submission,
That, like a mistress teaching him his lesson,
Commandeth him, doth she, on no pretence,
With paramour of hers to take offence.

6.

‘ For she forbade him jealousy at all,
And cruelty, and pride, and tyranny ;
And so at last reduced him in her thrall,
That, when she deigned on him to cast her eye,
He was all patience or to live or die ;
And thus she bridled him with harsh rebukes,
And nothing but caprice and scornful looks.

7.

‘ Who reigneth now in bliss but Venus fair,
That hath this worthy knight in servitude ?
Who singeth now but Mars her beauty rare,
Whose joys voluptuous tingle through his blood ?
And thus to her eternal love he vowed,
While she, responding to his passionate oath,
Repaid him with a pledge of constant truth.

8.

‘ United thus, and reigning like two stars
In heaven serene, it chanced upon a tide
That, by a secret loving compact, Mars
Was, at a certain time, to meet his bride
Within a neighbouring palace, there to abide
Until her following steps should his o’ertake,
He praying her to hasten for his sake.

9.

‘ My heart is thine, said he, my lady sweet,
And well thou know’st the dangers of that place ;
For, waiting there alone until we meet,
My life is held ’twixt accident and grace ;
But when I see the beauty of your face,
No thought of death can enter where thou art,
For thy sweet presence soothes and fills my heart.

10.

‘ Now she hath such compassion for her knight,
Who waited for her in that solitude,
Where no kind friends consoled him in his plight,
Or with a welcome cheered his dreary mood,
That it o’ercame her tender womanhood ;
And she sped swiftly forth, and reached the place
In half the time consumed in his slow pace.

11.

‘ The rapture of that meeting, and the joy
That filled their hearts and eyes, no tongue may tell ;
Nor on the fervid pleasures that employ
Their secret hours, let prying fancy dwell :
Enough that Mars, who doth all knights excel,
The Flower of Fairness wins in all her charms,
And Venus blesseth Mars, the god of arms.

12.

‘ Secluded in a chamber privily,
Sojourned Mars in that serene retreat
A certain time ; when on a sudden he
Heard Phœbus bursting through the palace-gate,
In motion sturdy and precipitate,
With flaming torch in hand, which, streaming bright,
On Venus’ chamber cast a flood of light.

13.

‘ This inner chamber, where the fair Queen lay,
Was painted round by art elaborate
With milk-white bulls, that caught the burning ray
Which swiftly must consume them in its heat.
This silly Venus wept disconsolate,
And cried, embracing Mars, ‘ I faint, expire!
The torch is come that sets the world on fire.’

14.

‘ Up started Mars, who listed not to sleep,
When that he heard his lady so complain,
But, for his nature was too strong to weep,
Instead of tears, light flashed from his eyes twain,—
The fiery sparkles springing out for pain ;
And, catching up his hauberk at his side,
He would not fly, whatever might betide.

15.

‘ He throweth on his helmet of huge weight,
And girt him with his sword, and in his hand
His mighty spear, as he was wont to fight,
Which shaketh in his seizure like a wand.
Full heavy was he to walk over land,
So must not bear sweet Venus company,
But, to escape from Phoebus, bade her fly.

16.

“ O woeful Mars, thou must thy fate arraign
That in the palace of thy happiness
Art left behind in peril to be slain :
And yet a greater grief thy thoughts oppress,
For she that hath thy valiant heart, alas !
Is lost to thee ; nor in thy utmost need
Canst thou discover whither she hath fled.

17.

‘ Now flieth Venus to Ciclinius’ tower,
Trying with baffling turns to avoid the light ;
But succour there is none for that fair flower,
The lonely building is deserted quite ;
And she, exhausted both by fear and flight,
With fluttering pulse, herself to hide and save,
Within the gate seeks shelter in a cave.

18.

‘ Dark was this cave, with stifling atmosphere
Of smoke, though close beside the gate it stood.
In darkness, for a day, I leave her there,
And turn to Mars, who, in his furious mood
Of sorrow, would have shed his own heart’s blood
To be with her in her extremity ;
For which dear guerdon he would gladly die.

19.

‘ Between the sweltering heat and raging pain,
He grew so feeble, that he scarce could bear
For two long days that rack of nerve and brain :
Then, though his mail was burthensome to wear,
He left the flaming place, to follow her
At whose departure he took greater ire,
Than he had felt for burning in the fire.

20.

‘ When he had softly walked a pace or two,
Complaining so that pity ’twas to hear,
He said, O lady bright, alas, I rue
That e’er so wide a compass was my sphere !
Alas ! when shall I meet thee, Venus dear ?
This twelfth of April, I endure for thee,
Through jealous Phœbus, all this misery !

21.

‘ Now God help silly Venus all alone !
But as God willed it, so it was to be,
That while that weeping Venus made her moan,
Ciclinius, riding in his chivalry,
Did happily the forlorn lady see ;
And to her giveth welcome and sweet cheer,
Receiving Venus as his friend full dear.

22.

‘ Mars dwelleth forth in his adversity,
For her departure ever sorrowing ;
What his complaint was, as remembereth me,
I, to this lusty morning murmuring,
With the best skill I can command, will sing,
And, when my song is done, my leave I’ll take,
And God give joy to all for their love’s sake.’

THE
COMPLAINT OF MARS.

1.

THE order of complaint should skilful be,
That if a wight shall sorrow piteously,
There must be cause whereof he doth complain ;
Or men may blame him for simplicity
And foolishness. Alas ! such am not I ;
Wherefore the ground and source of all my pain,
As clearly as I can with troubled brain,
I will rehearse ; not hoping for redress,
But to declare the cause of my distress.

2.

When first this image on my heart was wrought,
And I, for certain ends, was hither brought,
By Him who ruleth all intelligence,
I rendered my true service and my thought
For evermore—how dearly it was bought !—
To her who is of such great excellence,
That he who rashly giveth her offence
When she is wroth, and yieldeth him no cure,
No longer may the joys of love endure.

3.

This is no feigné matter that I tell ;
My lady is the very spring and well
Of beauty, gentleness, and liberty ;
Her rich array, a costly miracle ;
Her radiant spirits, playing like a spell,
All love and mirth and benign courtesy ;
Her voice, a swoon of sweetest melody
Of melting instruments ; and all refined
By universal grace to charm mankind.

4.

What wonder is it then that I should vow
Eternal servitude through weal and woe
To one whose might controls my destiny?
Therefore my heart to her in worship low
I dedicate, nor would I death forego
Her truest knight and servitor to be.
The world may know this is not flattery,
For this day I renounce my life, to prove,
In hopeless absence, my immortal love.

5.

To whom shall I complain of my distress?
Who may relieve me, who my heart redress?
Shall I complain unto my lady free?
Oh, no! for she hath such great heaviness
Of very fear and woe, that, as I guess,
In little time it would her death-doom be;
But, were she safe, no moan should come from me.
Alas! that lovers always must partake
Such perilous adventures for love's sake!

6.

For, notwithstanding lovers be as true
As any metal that is forgéd new,
Their tempers must submit to many trials :
Sometimes their ladies no compassion show,
Sometimes in jealousy they wrong them too,
Wounding their faith with crosses and denials ;
And sometimes Envy pours its poisoned phials
On their fair names. If such be true love's case,
He who is false may never hope for peace.

7.

But what availeth such a long relation
Of the vext life and wilfulness of Passion ?
I will return and linger with my pain ;
This is the story of my desolation—
My lady true, and my most dear salvation,
Is in a strait, where she laments in vain.
O lost sweet heart, O lady sovereign !
For thy distress I well might wail and die,
Though from all other sorrows I were free.

8.

To what end made the God who sits on high
Beneath him other love than heavenly,
Constraining men to love, whate'er bestead ?
Since that their joy, for all I can espy,
Endureth not the twinkling of an eye ;
While some have never joy till they be dead.
What meaneth this ? what is this mystery dread,
Whereto compelleth He the world so fast,
Things to desire and love that cannot last ?

9.

And though He made a lover love a thing
Which seemeth stedfast, no change harbouring,
Yet doth he charge it with a power malign
To kill repose—that gift bewildering !
Is it not wondrous that so just a King
To pangs like these his creatures should consign ?
Thus whether love to last or break incline,
'Tis certain he to whom its power is known,
Hath oftener woe than changéd is the moon.

10.

'Twould seem he lovers holds in enmity,
And like an angler, as we daily see,
Baiteth his hook with some delicious lure,
Which the poor fish pursueth eagerly,
Wild with impetuous longing, till he be
Of his desire too fatally secure,
And with it misery beyond all cure ;
For though the line break, yet the wound's so sore,
That he his wages hath for evermore.

11.

The brooch of Thebes was of so rich a kind,
So full of rubies, and of stones of Ind,
That he who once beheld its brilliancy,
Ravished with such strange lustre, lost his mind,
Gazing upon its light till he grew blind
With dazzled sense ; and such his ecstasy,
That he that treasure must possess, or die ;
Yet, when he has it, terrors rack his brain,
Lest, losing it, he should go mad again !

12.

And when it has passed out of his possession,
He's seized anew with double grief and passion,
That he so fair a jewel should forego ;
But yet this brooch, to make a true confession,
Was not the cause of so much consternation,
But he who cunningly enwrought it so,
That every wight who had it should have woe :
And therefore in the worker was the snare ;
The folly his, who sought a thing so rare.

13.

So fareth it by lovers and by me ;
For though my lady of such beauty be
That I was mad till I had won her grace,
She's not the cause of my adversity,
But He who formed her so enchantingly,
Putting such wondrous beauty in her face
That made me yearn for her, and so embrace
My death. Him blame I, then, that I should die,
And my own folly that I climbed so high.

14.

But ye, my hardy knights of brave renown,
In whose device I recognize my own,
Although unworthy of so great a name,
Yet as your patron, to all scholars known,
Let some compassion to my state be shown :
Take not my real troubles as a game ;
The proudest of ye may be made full tame.
Wherefore I pray you of your gentleness,
That you entreat some help for my distress.

15.

And ye, my ladies, that are true and stable,
By way of kindliness ye should be able
To pity those who're languishing in pain :
Now have ye cause to clothe yourselves in sable,
Since that your Empress, peerless, honorable,
Is desolate, well ought ye to complain.
Now should your holy tears fall fast as rain :
Alas ! your Empress pines in secret dread,
And, in despair of rescue, is nigh dead.

16.

Mourn too, ye lovers, weeping all in fear,
For her, who, with unfeigné humble cheer,
Was prompt to give ye succour in good sooth ;
Mourn her, to genial lovers ever dear,
The beautiful, the free, the frank, sincere ;
Mourn her, the crown of all the dreams of youth,
The ensample bright of honour and of truth ;
With tender thoughts bewail her deep distress,
Who never yet did ought but gentleness.

THE
COMPLAINT OF VENUS.

1.

THERE is no comfort to my thoughts so high,
When any heavy griefs my heart distress,
As to have leisure for sweet memory
To think upon the chivalrous address,
The truth, and constancy, and proud impress
Of manhood, that distinguish him I love ;
Such solace sure no creature can reprove,
For every wight praiseth his gentleness.

2.

He is with wise and liberal qualities
More bountifully graced than wit can guess ;
And knighthood to his paramount worth decrees
The noblest place its thronging ranks possess ;
And honour honoureth him for his noblesse ;
And nature hath endowed him with such store
Of perfect gifts, I'm his for evermore ;
For every wight praiseth his gentleness.

3.

Yet, notwithstanding all his excellence,
His gentle heart such meekness doth express
To me in word, in deed, in countenance,
To serve me his whole business, with excess
Of patient duty, that I ought to bless
The adventure of my love, alike secure
In service and in honour to endure ;
For every wight praiseth his gentleness.

4.

Now certes, love, it is quite pardonable
That men should ill abide thy noble dealing ;
Waking in bed, and feasting at the table ;
To weep in laughter, and to sing in wailing,
Dark shadows on their downcast visage stealing ;
Often to change their flitting countenance ;
Playing in sleep and dreaming in the dance ;
All the reverse of any gladsome feeling.

5.

Mean jealousy he hung upon a cable,
For he despised that prying mischief, trailing
Its slime o'er all things fair and reasonable,
The purest lives with poisonous fangs assailing ;

And thus love's ills over its joys prevailing
Make it a rash and dear-bought ordinance,
With sorrow enough and little of pleasance,
All the reverse of any gladsome feeling.

6.

Love is agreeable and sweet at first,
But in its use brings heavy care and toiling ;
For subtle jealousy, by falsehood nursed,
Full often makes its service unavailing :
And thus 'tis ever, new distrusts entailing,
We languish for the want of confidence,
Enforced to suffer many a hard mischance,
All the reverse of any gladsome feeling.

7.

But certes, Love, I speak not in this wise
To escape my bonds by way of argument ;
For I so long have worn them in thine eyes
That to be free I never will consent,
Though racking jealousy my heart torment ;
Sufficeth me to see him when I may ;
And therefore, certes, to mine ending day,
To love him best I never shall repent.

8.

And certes, Love, look north, east, south, and west,
Through every state that man may represent ;
Still through thy franchise I have chosen the best
Beneath the circuit of the firmament.
Now love well, heart, and look ye never stint ;
And let the jealous put thee in assay,
No agony can force me to say “ Nay,”
To love him best I never shall repent.

9.

O heart, to thee it ought enough suffice
That Love so high a grace hath to thee sent,
Choosing the worthiest in all men's eyes,
And the most pleasing to mine own content ;
Then seek no further—here rest permanent,
Since that thou hast sufficient for thy pay ;
And thus, true heart, I end my tristful lay,
To love him best I never shall repent.

L'ENVOYE.

Princes, receive this lyric graciously,
Which to your excellent benignity
I do address in my incompetence ;
For age, that in my spirit dulleth me,
Hath nigh extinguished all the subtlety
Of writing, and its mental elements :
Therefore it is with pain and diffidence
Such rhyme, new to the English tongue, I try,
To follow word for word the melody
Of Granson, flower of those who rhyme in France.

EXPLICIT.

QUEEN ANNELIDA & FALSE ARCITE;

MODERNIZED BY

ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.



QUEEN ANNELIDA & FALSE ARCITE.

1.

O THOU fierce God of armies, Mars the red,
Who in thy frosty country calléd Thrace,
Within thy grisly temples full of dread,
Art honoured as the patron of that place,
With the Bellona Pallas, full of grace !
Be present ; guide, sustain this song of mine,
Beginning which, I cry toward thy shrine.

2.

For deep the hope is sunken in my mind,
In piteous-hearted English to indite
This story old, which I in Latin find,
Of Queen Annelida and false Arcite :
Since Time, whose rust can all things fret and bite,
In fretting many a tale of equal fame,
Hath from our memory nigh devoured this same.

3.

Thy favour, Polyhymnia, also deign,
Who, in thy sisters' green Parnassian glade,
By Helicon, not far from Cirrha's fane,
Singest with voice memorial in the shade,
Under the laurel which can never fade ;
Now grant my ship, that some smooth haven win her !
I follow Statius first, and then Corinna.

4.

When Theseus by a long and deathly war
The hardy Scythian race had overcome,
He, laurel-crownéd, in his gold-wrought car,
Returning to his native city home,
The blissful people for his pomp make room,
And throw their shouts up to the stars, and bring
The general heart out for his honouring.

5.

Before the Duke, in sign of victory,
The trumpets sound, and in his banner large
Dilates the figure of Mars—and men may see,
In token of glory, many a treasure charge,
Many a bright helm, and many a spear and targe,
Many a fresh knight, and many a blissful rout
On horse and foot, in all the field about.

6.

Hippolyte, his wife, the heroic queen
Of Scythia, conqueress though conqueréd,
With Emily, her youthful sister sheen,
Fair in a car of gold he with him led.
The ground about her car she overspread
With brightness from the beauty in her face,
Which smiled forth largesses of love and grace.

7.

Thus triumphing, and laurel-crownéd thus,
In all the flower of Fortune's high providing,
I leave this noble prince, this Theseus,
Toward the walls of Athens bravely riding,—
And seek to bring in, without more abiding,
Something of that whereof I 'gan to write,
Of fair Annelida and false Arcite.

8.

Fierce Mars, who in his furious course of ire,
The ancient wrath of Juno to fulfil,
Had set the nations' mutual hearts on fire
In Thebes and Argos, (so that each would kill
Either with bloody spears,) grew never still—
But rushed now here, now there, among them both,
Till each was slain by each, they were so wroth.

9.

For when Parthenopæus and Tydeus
Had perished with Hippomedon,—also
Amphiaraus and proud Capaneus,—
And when the wretched Theban brethren two
Were slain, and King Adrastus home did go—
So desolate stood Thebes, her halls so bare,
That no man's love could remedy his care.

10.

And when the old man, Creon, 'gan espy
How darkly the blood royal was brought down,
He held the city in his tyranny,
And forced the nobles of that región
To be his friends and dwell within the town ;
Till half for love of him, and half for fear,
Those princely persons yielded, and drew near,—

11.

Among the rest the young Armenian queen,
Annelida, was in that city living.
She was as beauteous as the sun was sheen,
Her fame to distant lands such glory giving,
That all men in the world had some heart-striving
To look on her. No woman, sooth, can be,
Though earth is rich in fairness, fair as she.

12.

Young was this queen, but twenty summers old,
Of middle stature, and such wondrous beauty,
That Nature, self-delighted, did behold
A rare work in her—while, in stedfast duty,
Lucretia and Penelope would suit ye
With a worse model—all things understood,
She was, in short, most perfect fair and good.

13.

The Theban knight eke, to give all their due,
Was young, and therewithal a lusty knight.
But he was double in love, and nothing true,
Ay, subtler in that craft than any wight,
And with his cunning won this lady bright;
So working on her simpleness of nature,
That she him trusted above every creature.

14.

What shall I say? She lovéd Arcite so,
That if at any hour he parted from her,
Her heart seemed ready anon to burst in two;
For he with lowliness had overcome her:
She thought she knew the heart which did foredoom her.
But he was false, and all that softness feigning,—
I trow men need not *learn* such arts of paining.

15.

And ne'ertheless full mickle business
Had he, before he might his lady win,—
He swore that he should die of his distress,
His brain would madden with the fire within!
Alas, the while! for it was ruth and sin,
That she, sweet soul, upon his grief should rue;
But little reckon false hearts as the true.

16.

And she to Arcite so subjected her,
That all she did or had seemed his of right:
No creature in her house met smile or cheer,
Further than would be pleasant to Arcite;
There was no lack whereby she did despite
To his least will—for hers to his was bent,
And all things which pleased him made her content.

17.

No kind of letter to her fair hands came,
Touching on love, from any kind of wight,
But him she showed it ere she burned the same:
So open was she, doing all she might,
That nothing should be hidden from her knight,
Lest he for any untruth should upbraid her,—
The slave of his unspoken will she made her.

18.

He played his jealous fancies over her,
And if he heard that any other man
Spoke to her, would beseech her straight to swear
To each word—or the speaker had his ban ;
And out of her sweet wits she almost ran
For fear ; but all was fraud and flattery,
Since without love he feignéd jealousy.

19.

All which with so much sweetness suffered she,
Whate'er he willed she thought the wisest thing ;
And evermore she loved him tenderly,
And did him honour as he were a king.
Her heart was wedded to him with a ring,
So eager to be faithful and intent,
That wheresoe'er he wandered, there it went.

20.

When she would eat he stole away her thought,
Till little thought for food, I ween, was kept ;
And when a time for rest the midnight brought,
She always mused upon him till she slept,—
When he was absent, secretly she wept ;
And thus lived Queen Annelida the fair,
For false Arcite, who worked her this despair.

21.

This false Arcite in his new-fangleness,
Because so gentle were her ways and true,
Took the less pleasure in her stedfastness,
And saw another lady proud and new,
And right anon he clad him in her hue ;
I know not whether white, or red, or green,
Betraying fair Annelida the Queen.

22.

And yet it was no thing to wonder on,
Though he were false—It is the way of man,
(Since Lamech was, who flourished years ago,)
To be in love as false as any can ;
For *he* was the first father who began
To love two ; and I trow, indeed, that he
Invented tents as well as bigamy.

23.

And having so betrayed her, false Arcite
Feign'd more, that primal wrong to justify.
A vicious horse will snort besides his bite ;
And so he taunted her with treachery,
Swearing he saw thro' her duplicity,
And how she was not loving, but false-hearted—
The perjured traitor swore thus, and departed.

24.

Alas, alas, what heart could suffer it,
For ruth, the story of her grief to tell?
What thinker hath the cunning and the wit
To image it? what hearer, strength to dwell
A room's length off, while I rehearse the hell
Suffered by Queen Annelida the fair
For false Arcite, who worked her this despair?

25.

She weepeth, waileth, swooneth piteously;
She falleth on the earth dead as a stone;
Her graceful limbs are cramped convulsively;
She speaketh out wild, as her wits were gone.
No colour, but an ashen paleness—none—
Touched cheek or lips; and no word shook their white,
But ' Mercy cruel heart! mine own Arcite!'

26.

Thus it continued, till she pinéd so,
And grew so weak, her feet no more could bear
Her body, languishing in ceaseless woe.
Whereof Arcite had neither ruth nor care—
His heart had put out new-green shoots elsewhere;
Therefore he deigned not on her grief to think,
And reckoned little, did she float or sink.

27.

His fine new lady kept him in such narrow
Strict limit, by the bridle, at the end
O' the whip, he feared her least word as an arrow,—
Her threatening made him, as a bow, to bend,
And at her pleasure did he turn and wend;
Seeing she never granted to this lover
A single grace he could sing ' Ios ' over.

28.

She drove him forth—she scarcely deigned to know
That he was servant to her ladyship :
But, lest he should be proud, she kept him low,
Nor paid his service from a smiling lip :
She sent him now to land, and now to ship ;
And giving him all danger to his fill,
She thereby had him at her sovereign will.

29.

Be taught of this, ye prudent women all,
Warn'd by Annelida and false Arcite :
Because she chose, himself, ' dear heart ' to call
And be so meek, he loved her not aright.
The nature of man's heart is to delight
In something strange—moreover, (may Heaven save
The wrong'd) the thing they cannot, they would have.

30.

Now turn we to Annelida again,
Who pinéd day by day in languishment.
But when she saw no comfort met her pain,
Weeping once in a woeful unconstraint,
She set herself to fashion a complaint,
Which with her own pale hand she 'gan to write,
And sent it to her lover, to Arcite.

THE COMPLAINT

OF

ANNELIDA TO FALSE ARCITE.

I.

THE sword of sorrow, whetted sharp for me
On false delight, with point of memory
Stabb'd so mine heart, bliss-bare and black of hue,
That all to dread is turn'd my dance's glee,
My face's beauty to despondency—
For nothing it availeth to be true—
And, whosoever is so, she shall rue
Obeying love, and cleaving faithfully
Alway to one, and changing for no new.

II.

I ought to know it well as any wight,
For *I* loved one with all my heart and might,
More than myself a hundred-thousand fold,
And calléd him my heart's dear life, my knight,
And was all his, as far as it was right ;
His gladness did my blitheness make of old,
And in his least disease my death was told ;
Who, on his side, had plighted lovers' plight,
Me, evermore, his lady and love to hold.

III.

Now is he false—alas, alas !—although
Unwronged ! and acting such a ruthless part,
That with a little word he will not deign
To bring the peace back to my mournful heart.
Drawn in, and caught up by another's art,
Right as he will, he laugheth at my pain ;
While *I*—I cannot my weak heart restrain
From loving him—still, aye ; yet none I know
To whom of all this grief I can complain.

IV.

Shall I complain (ah, piteous and harsh sound !)
Unto my foe, who gave mine heart a wound,
And still desireth that the harm be more ?
Now certes, if I sought the whole earth round,
No other help, no better leach were found !
My destiny hath shaped it so of yore—
I would not other medicine, nor yet lore.
I would be ever where I once was bound ;
And what I said, would say for evermore.

V.

Alas ! and where is gone your gentillesse ?
Where gone your pleasant words, your humbleness ?
Where your devotion full of reverent fear,
Your patient loyalty, your busy address
To me, whom once you called nothing less
Than mistress, sovereign lady, i' the sphere
O' the world ? Ah me ! no word, no look of cheer,
Will you vouchsafe upon my heaviness !
Alas your love ! I bought it all too dear.

VI.

Now certes, sweet, howe'er you be
The cause so, and so causelessly,
Of this my mortal agony,
Your reason should amend the failing !
Your friend, your true love, do you flee,
Who never in time nor yet degree
Grieved you : so may the all-knowing He
Save my lorn soul from future wailing.

VII.

Because I was so plain, Arcite,
In all my doings, your delight,
Seeking in all things, where I might
In honour,—meek and kind and free ;
Therefore you do me such despite.
Alas ! howe'er through cruelty
My heart with sorrow's sword you smite,
You cannot kill its love.—Ah me !

VIII.

Ah, my sweet foe, why do you so
For shame ?
Think you that praise, in sooth, will raise
Your name,
Loving anew, and being untrue
For aye ?
Thus casting down your manhood's crown
In blame,
And working *me* adversity,
The same
Who loves you most—(O God, thou know'st !)
Alway ?
Yet turn again—be fair and plain
Some day ;
And then shall this, that seem's amiss,
Be game,
All being forgiv'n, while yet from heav'n
I stay.

IX.

Behold, dear heart, I write this to obtain
Some knowledge, whether I should pray or 'plaine :
Which way is best to force you to be true ?
For either I must have you in my chain,
Or you, sweet, with the death must part us twain ;
There is no mean, no other way more new :
And, that Heaven's mercy on my soul may rue
And let you slay me outright with this pain,
The whiteness in my cheeks may prove to you.

X.

For hitherto mine own death have I sought ;
Myself I murder with my secret thought,
In sorrow and ruth of your unkindnesses !
I weep, I wail, I fast—all helpeth nought,
I flee all joy (I mean the name of aught),
I flee all company, all mirthfulness—
Why, who can make her boast of more distress
Than I ?—To such a plight you have me brought,
Guiltless (I need no witness) ne'ertheless.

XI.

Shall I go pray and wail my womanhood ?
Compared to such a deed, death's self were good.
What ! ask for mercy, and guiltless—where's the need ?
And if I wailed my life so,—that you would
Care nothing, is less feared than understood :
And if mine oath of love I dared to plead
In mine excuse,—your scorn would be its meed.
Ah, love ! it giveth flowers instead of seed—
Full long ago I might have taken heed.

XII.

And though I had you back to-morrow again,
I might as well hold April from the rain
As hold you to the vows you vowed me last.
Maker of all things, and truth's sovereign,
Where is the truth of man, who hath it slain,
That she who loveth him should find him fast
As in a tempest is a rotten mast ?
Is that a *tame* beast which is ever fain
To flee us when restraint and fear are past ?

XIII.

Now mercy, sweet, if I mis-say;—
Have I said aught is wrong to-day?
I do not know—my wits' astray—
I fare as doth the song of one who weepeth;
For now I 'plaine, and now I play—
I am so mazed, I die away—
Arcite you have the key for aye
Of all my world, and all the good it keepeth.

XIV.

And in this world there is not one
Who walketh with a sadder moan,
And bears more grief than I have done;
And if light slumbers overcome me,
Methinks your image, in the glory
Of skiey azure, stands before me,
Re-vowing the old love you bore me,
And praying for new mercy from me.

XV.

Through the long night, this wondrous sight,
Bear I,
Which haunteth still, the daylight, till
I die :
But nought of this, your heart, I wis,
Can reach.
Mine eyes down-pour, they nevermore
Are dry,
While to your ruth, and eke your truth,
I cry—
But, weladay, too far be they
To fetch.
Thus destiny is holding me—
Ah, wretch !
And when I fain would break the chain,
And try—
Faileth my wit (so weak is it)
With speech.

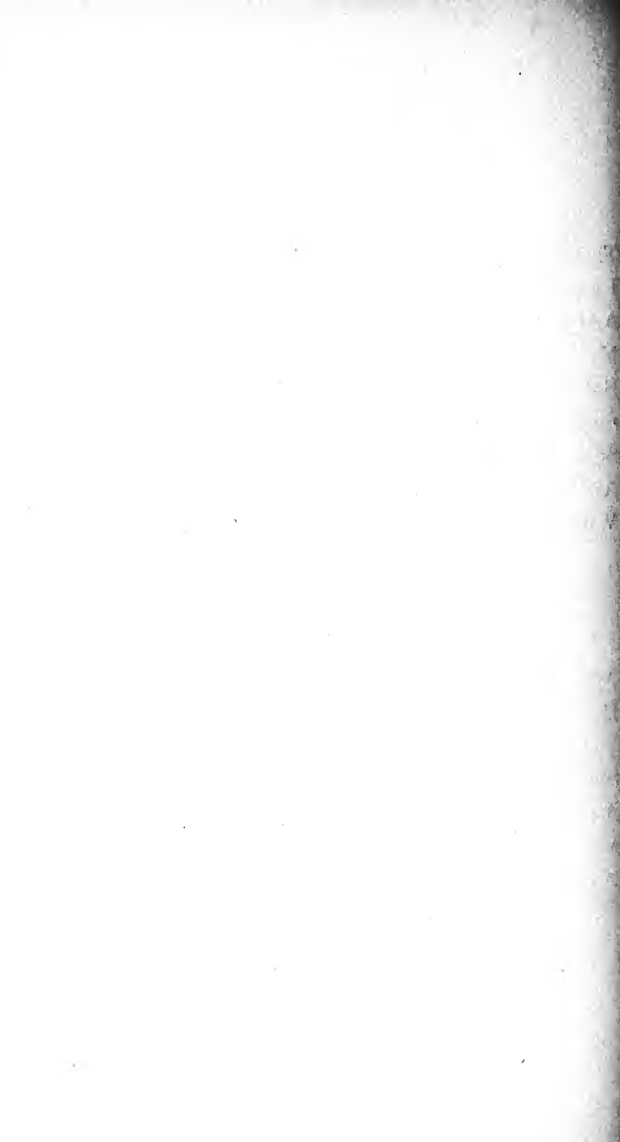
XVI.

Therefore I end thus, since my hope is o'er—
 I give all up both now and evermore ;
 And in the balance ne'er again will lay
 My safety, nor be studious in love-lore.
 But like the swan who, as I heard of yore,
 Singeth life's penance on his deathly day,
 So I sing here my life and woes away,—
 Ay, how you, cruel Arcite, wounded sore,
 With memory's point, your poor Annelida.

XVII.

After Annelida, the woeful queen,
 Had written in her own hand in this wise,
 With ghastly face, less pale than white, I ween,
 She fell a-swooning ; then she 'gan arise,
 And unto Mars voweth a sacrifice
 Within the temple, with a sorrowful bearing,
 And in such phrase as meets your present hearing.

EXPLICIT.



THE SQUIRE'S TALE;

MODERNIZED

BY LEIGH HUNT.

NOTE.

“The king of Araba sendith to Cambuscan, king of Sarra, a horse and a sword of rare qualitie, and to his daughter Canace a glass and a ring, by the vertue whereof she understandeth the language of all fowles. Much of this tale is either lost, or else never finished by Chaucer.”—URRY.

This is the story that Milton so admired.

“Or call up him that left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold,
Of Camball and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That own'd the virtuous ring and glass;
And of the wonderous horse of brass,
On which the Tartar king did ride.”

It is strange that Milton should have pronounced the word *Cambùscan*; nor is it pleasant, when his robust line must be resounding in the ear of every one to whom the story is called to mind, to be forced to obey even the greater dictation of the original, and throw the accent, as it undoubtedly ought to be thrown, on the last syllable. On no theory as respects Chaucer's versification, does it appear intelligible how Milton could have thrown the accent on the second syllable, when the other reading stares us in the face throughout the poem. Thus much for the necessity of departing from the great poet's innovation. How far the attempt to re-versify the poem itself can be considered excusable, must be left to the brotherly kindness of those fellow-worshippers of Chaucer, who may think that love will warrant liberties, which could not be allowed on any other pretension. But the Introductory Preface to the volume will have anticipated the writer on this head.

THE SQUIRE'S TALE;

OR,

THE ADVENTURES OF THE TARTAR KING,
AND HIS FAMILY.

A FRAGMENT.

At Sarra, in the land of Tartary,
There dwelt a king, and with the Russ warr'd he,
Through which there perish'd many a doughty man.—
This noble king by name was Cambuscán,
And in his time was of so great renown,
That no where else there sat beneath a crown
So excellent a lord in every thing.
Him lack'd there nought belonging to a king,
Within the creed to which his race was born.
He kept the law to which he had been sworn;
And thereto he was hardy, rich, and wise,
Always the same, serene of soul and eyes,
Piteous and just, benign and honourable,

Of his brave heart as any centre stable ;
Young, fresh, and strong, in arms desirous,
As any bachelor of all his house.
A fair person he was, and fortunate ;
And always kept so well a king's estate,
That there was no where such another man.

This noble king, this Tartar, Cambuscán,
Two princes had by Elfeta his wife,
Of which the eldest was named Algarsife,
The other Cambalo : and there was born
Also a daughter to him, like the morn,
Younger than both, whose name was Canace :
But to relate how beautiful was she,
Passeth the reach of my poetic wing ;
I dare not undertake so high a thing.
Mine English too sufficeth not. A man
Had need an Ovid be, or Mantuan,
And know all colours fitted for the art,
To shew you what she was, in the least part ;
I am none such. Plain speech must be my plan.
And so befell, that when this Cambuscán
Had twenty winters been a crownéd king,
He bade, as was his custom in the spring,
The feast of his nativity be cried

In Sarra, his great city, far and wide,
The news whereof was glad to every ear.

Phœbus, the sun, full jovial was, and clear ;
For he was mounting nigh his exaltation
In Mars's face, and in his house and station
In Aries, the cholerick hot sign.
Full lusty was the weather, and benign ;
For which the birds, against the sunny sheen,
What for the season and the sprouting green,
Securely and full loud sang their affections :
They seem'd to say,—We now have got protections
Against the sword of winter, keen and cold.

This royal king then, glorious to behold
With crown and ermine, sat upon his dais *
In his great hall, in all the people's gaze,
And held his feast, so rich and so serene,
In all the world was no such other seen.
What need describe it ? for to tell the array,
And half the meats, would take a summer's day ;
And therefore I pass by their dainty shews,

* The elevated portion of a hall, where the chief person sat under a canopy.

Their swans, and peacocks, and their heronneaues*,
With meats that by a Tartar seneschal
Are held full dear, though here we count them small.
Besides, the bell hath warn'd me it is prime,
And I must trespass not on others' time,
But into closer strain my theme enforce†.

And so befell, that after the third course,
While that this king sat thus in his array,
Hearing his minstrels and his harpers play
Before him at his board deliciously,
In at the hall-door lo ! all suddenly
There came a knight upon a steed of brass,
That in his hand a mirror held of glass ;
Upon his thumb he had a golden ring,
And by his side a naked sword hanging ;
And up he rideth to the royal board.
In all the hall there was not spoke a word
For marvel of this knight. Him to behold
Full busily they waited, young and old.

This strange knight, that appeared thus suddenly,

* Young herons.

† The reader will recollect, that it is the Squire who is relating the story, and that more than half the others remained to be told.

All armed except his head, full gorgeously,
Saluteth king and queen, and nobles all,
In order as they sat within the hall,
With so high reverence and regardfulness,
Both in his word and in his whole address,
That Gawain's self, with his old courtesy,
Had he left Fairy-land, and stood thereby,
Had not improv'd him in a single thing :
And after this, strait looking at the king,
His message with a manly voice he spoke,
After the form belonging to his folk,
With not a fault of syllable or letter ;
And that his meaning might be felt the better,
His cheer was suited to his words ; as teach
Those learned wits, that ken the art of speech.
I may not tell it as he did : my strain
Is far too weak such rhetorick to attain.
Yet to repeat it, in a common way,
As shewing what at large he meant to say,
Thus much will I attempt to call to mind :

“ My lord, the king of Araby and Ind,
My sovereign master, on this solemn day,
Saluteth you, as he best can and may,
And sendeth you, in honour of your feast,

By me, your ready servant though your least,
This steed of brass ; which well, as in this hall,
Can, in the space of a day natural,
That is to say, in four-and-twenty hours,
Where'er you list, in sunshine or in showers,
Carry your body into every place,
In which it please you shew your sovereign face,
Nor stain you with a speck, through foul or fair ;
Or if you list to sail as high in air
As doth an eagle, when he wills to soar,
This same good steed shall bear you evermore
Without a peril, (though ye take no keep
Of bridle as ye go ; nay, sit and sleep) ;
Then turn again with writhing of a pin.
He, Sir, that made it, knew all arts herein,
And waited upon many a constellation
While patiently he work'd his operation,
And knew full many a seal, and many a bond.

“ This glass I hold, clear as a diamond,
Hath such a pow'r, that in it men may see
When there shall happen any adversity
Unto your reign, or to yourself ; and know,
By very sight, who is your friend or foe :
And more than this, if any lady bright

Have set her heart on any thankless knight,
And he be false, here shall the lady see
His new love, and his thorough subtlety,
So plain and clear, that nothing he shall hide.

“ Wherefore against this lusty summer-tide,
This glass, and this ring also, my lord, he
Hath sent unto my lady Canace,
Your excellent daughter that is here ;—a thing
So virtuous, this simple-seeming ring,
That let her bear it, either on her hand,
Or in her purse, and she shall understand
The tongue and speech of every fowl that flies,
And answer him in his own birdly wise.
Also each herb that groweth shall she read,
And whom it may avail, though that he bleed
From dreadful wounds, never so deep and wide.

“ This naked sword, that hangeth by my side,
Such virtue hath, that whomsoe'er it smite,
Clean through his armour will it carve and bite,
Were it as thick as is a branchéd oak ;
And whosoe'er is wounded with the stroke,
Shall never be whole man, till of your grace
It please you stroke him in the wounded place

With the flat side. The wound will then be closed.
All this is truth, Sir. Nothing have I glosed.
Nor while 'tis held in hand, will the sword fail."

And when the stranger thus hath told his tale,
He backeth from the hall with reverent heed,
And so, forth issuing, lighteth from the steed.
The steed, which like the sun for brightness shone,
Stood in the court as still as any stone.
The knight hath doff'd his armour for a vest
Of peace, and sitteth as an honour'd guest;
And to a tow'r, where all high gifts are stor'd,
Are borne in state the mirror and the sword.
But unto Canace is borne the ring,
Solemnly, there as she sat next the king.
As to the horse, immoveable it stood,
Stuck to the ground, as though it had been glued:
Nor had it stirr'd, I ween, though folk had brought
Pulley or windlass. It had serv'd them nought.
And why? Because none knew the mystery;
And so they left him, standing steadfastly,
Till, sometime before dusk, the knight may chuse
To shew them how to stir his brazen thews.

Great was the press came swarming to and fro

To gaze upon this steed, that standeth so ;
For it was of a make so broad, and long,
And high, and so proportion'd to be strong,
It match'd therein a steed of Lombardy,
And yet withal it was so quick of eye,
So " horsely," and so full of airy grace,
It might have been of gentle Apulian race.
The people thought so ; and were all agreed,
From tail to ear it was a matchless steed.
But what incessantly amaz'd them, was
How it could go like life, and yet was brass :
All deem'd it a thing magical ; but then
How made, and by what sort of man of men ?
Divers the folk, divers the fantasy :
For just as many wits as heads there be.
They murmur'd like a swarm, out of the hive :
Some deem'd the creature senseless, some alive ;
Some liken'd it, from what is told to us
By the old poets, to the Pegasus,—
The horse that had the wings ; and others fear'd
It might be like the Greek horse, that appear'd
Within Troy town, and laid the city low.
Quoth one of these,—" I dread it : for I trow
Soldiers are stuff'd therein, and 'tis a plot.
'Twere well the thing were look'd into, God wot."

Another whisper'd, " He's a fool, this clerk ;
'Tis manifestly some magician's work ;
Some juggle, Sirs ; a kind of—sort of—trick :"
And others doubt, whether some heretic
Might not have wrought it, or some infidel,
And whether, taking it, the king did well.
For what mean spirits may not comprehend,
They gladly construe to the baser end.

Some again marvell'd on the glass, and how
Fools could suppose it what they heard but now.
But others said, it might be well suppos'd,
Since natural art found wondrous things enclos'd
In angles and reflections; as a pond
Encloseth scenes beside it, and beyond :
In Rome, they said, was such a glass ; and, lo !
Read what Alhazen and Vitellio,
And other wits have spoken in their lives,
That writ of mirrors and of perspectives,
As Aristotle did to please his lord.

Others again marvell'd upon the sword,
That pierc'd through every thing ; and fell in speech
Of Telephus, whose wound, in stead of leech,
Was by the quaint spear of Achilles clos'd,

Right in such wise as hath been just suppos'd.
Of metals, and of med'cines therewithal,
And from their compounds what strange things might
 fall,
Much they discours'd ; but more than I may tell ;
And then upon the lady's ring they fell
And said they never heard of craft so strange,
Save what by some was deem'd within the range
Of Moses' wisdom, and of Solomon's ;
And then they spake apart, in lower tones.

Nevertheless, some argued, strange it was
To see fern-ashes made a cause of glass,
Since glass in nought resembleth ash of fern ;
Only in thus far reaching to discern
The cause of glass, men leave to stare and wonder.
So happeth it in wond'ring upon thunder,
On ebb and flood, on gossamer and mist,
And all things else, until the cause is wist.
Thus jangle they, and reason, and devise,
Till that the king 'gan from his board arise.

Phœbus hath left his chair meridional,
And now was moving t'wards the Lion's stall,

(The gentle beast, with his star Aldrian,)
When that this Tartar king, this Cambuscán,
Rose from his board, there as he sat full high :
Before him goeth the loud minstrelsy ;
And thus he paceth to his painted hall,
Where other music soundeth over all,
And played such things, it was a heaven to hear.

And now went lusty Venus' children dear
Dancing away ; for in the Fish full high
She sat, and view'd them with a friendly eye.

This noble king is set upon his throne ;
The stranger knight is brought to him anon,
And goeth down the dance with Canace.

Here rageth now the sport and jollity,
Such as no dull man fitteth to devise :
He must have known Love well and his bright eyes,
And been a festive soul, as fresh as May,
To dare to hope to tell you the array.
Who else could speak of all the forms of dances
Dulcet and wild, and the fresh countenances
Full of such looks and such dissimulings,

For fear of jealous men's discoverings?
No man but Launcelot*, and he is dead.
Therefore I pass by all this lustyhead,
And say no more; leaving, in midst of all,
The mirth to spin, till men to supper call.

The steward bade the spicers haste, and see
The wines made hot, during this melody;
And now the ushers and the squires are gone;
The spicers and the butlers come anon;
They eat and drink, and when this hath an end,
The company unto the temple wend,
As reason is; and then they sup by day.
What need instruct you of this new array?
Who wotteth not, that at a prince's feast
Is plenty for the greatest and the least,
And dainties more than such as I may know?

So after supper this great king must go
To see the horse of brass, with all a rout

* Launcelot of the Lake, famous for the perfection of his knight-errantry, which included the power to entertain and be eloquent, as well as to fight. There is also an allusion here to his love for Ginevre, and the jealousy of King Arthur.

Of ladies and of lords him round about ;
For such a wond'ring was there on this thing,
That since the siege of Troy, which poets sing,
Where on a horse was wond'ring among men,
Never was such a wond'ring as was then.
But, finally, the king asketh the knight
The virtue of this courser, and the might,
And prayed him to detail his governaunce.

This horse anon began to trip and dance,
Soon as the knight laid hand upon the rein,
Who said, " There is no more, Sir, to explain
Or bear in mind when we two speak alone,
Than trill a pin here, as shall then be shown ;
Yet also you must name your journey's end :
Likewise must bid him, when you please, descend,
Then trill another pin, and then will he
Go down where'er you please full easily,
And rest, whate'er betide him, in one spot,
Though all the world be sworn that he shall not.
Trill yet this other pin, and in a wink
Vanish will he, whither no soul may think ;
And yet return, be it by day or night,
The moment he is call'd, as swift as light.

Ride where you list, there's no more need be done."

When thus the king his lesson had begun,
And furthermore, when, whispering with the knight,
He knew the thing and its whole form aright,
Full glad was he ; then turning with his train
Repair'd him to his mirth yet once again.
The bridle to a tow'r is borne, and there
Laid up among the jewels, rich and rare ;
The horse has vanish'd, I may not tell how ;
And I myself, awhile, must vanish now,
Leaving this Cambuscán, this noble king,
Feasting his lords till day was nigh to spring.

PARS SECUNDA.

The nourisher of good digestion, sleep,
'Gan on them wink, and bade their thoughts take keep
That mirth as well as labour will have rest ;
And with a gaping mouth *, the king express'd
The will of Sleep, that it was time for bed,

* A curious evidence of the difference of manners in those days (for the reader need not be told that poets then painted the manners of their own time, no matter where the scene of their story was laid).

For blood was dominant in drowsy head.
“ Cherish the friend of nature, blood,” quoth he.
Gaping, they gave him thanks, by two and three,
And so the company withdrew to rest,
As sleep so will’d. They took it for the best.

The dreams they dreamt shall not be told for me.
Full were their heads of feast’s fumosity,
Which causeth men, without a horse, to fly.
They slept, until the day was broad and high,
The most of them,—save lady Canace ;
For like sweet maiden, temperate was she,
And of her father had she taken leave,
To go to rest, soon after it was eve ;
She wish’d not to look pale next day, nor be
In aught unfitting the festivity.
And so she slept her first sleep, and then woke ;
For such a pleasure in her heart she took
Of her two presents by the stranger brought,
She twenty times chang’d colour at the thought.
Now for the ring, now for the glass it was ;
And in a dream she saw things in the glass.
Wherefore, before the sun ’gan up to glide,
She call’d the good dame sleeping by her side,
And said it was her pleasure to arise.

The good old dame, that was as gladly wise
As her sweet self (in sooth had train'd her so),
Said smilingly, "Why, where then would ye go?
For all the people, Madam, are in bed."
"I cannot sleep, do all I may," she said;
"And so I would arise and walk about."

This good old lady calleth the whole rout
Of women, and they rise, and bustleth she,
And riseth also then fresh Canace,
As ruddy and bright as is the vernal sun,
When in the Ram his fourth degree is run;
No higher was he when he view'd her face;
And forth she walketh at an easy pace,
Array'd, as suiteth with the lusty prime,
Lightly to play, and to enjoy the time
With some few maidens of her company;
And forth into the park thus moveth she.

The vapour, breathing upward on her road,
Maketh the sun to seem ruddy and broad.
Nathless the dawning was so fair a sight,
It made the hearts in all their bosoms light;
And she herself, what for the time of day,
And the sweet birds, and all she heard them say,

By reason of the ring, halteth full oft,
And listeneth, and laugheth, glad and soft.

The one main point, whenever tale is told,
If it be tarried, till the ear grow cold,
Loseth its savour, whatsoe'er it be,
For fulsomeness of the prolixity ;
Wherefore her walking getteth no more words ;
I come at once, so please ye, to the birds.

Amidst a tree all dry, as white as chalk,
As Canace was playing in her walk,
There sat a falcon over head, full high,
That with a piteous voice so 'gan to cry,
And beat herself so hard with both her wings,
That all the wood rang with her sufferings,
And the red blood went trickling down the tree ;
And ever shriek'd and flapp'd herself thus she,
And with her beak so tore into her breast,
That never was brute beast, the cruellest,
That had not wept (if beasts could weep) to hear
How loud she shriek'd. It was a very fear.

Now never liv'd the fowler that could tell
Of falcons, and describe their beauty well,

Who spoke of one which might with this compare
For gentle shape as well as plumage fair.
She seem'd a Falcon Peregrine, far flown ;
And ever and anon she gave a groan
For lack of blood, and in a swoon went she,
Till she had well nigh fallen from the tree.

This fair king's daughter, Canace, whose ring
Upon her finger told her every thing
Which birds might say, or might be said to birds,
Hath comprehended all the falcon's words ;
And to the tree she hasteth fearfully,
And at the bird uplooketh piteously,
And holdeth her lap wide to save her fall,
In case again she swoon on the tree tall :
And a long while so stood and waited she,
Till at the last she spoke full tenderly :—

“ What is the cause,” quoth she, “ if ye may tell,
That thus ye be in very pain of hell ?
Take heed, I pray thee, grovelling there above :
Is it for grief of death, or loss of love ?
For these are the two things that cause most woe
In gentle heart. Nought else could grieve thee so.
Yourself ye wreak upon yourself ; which sheweth,

No other cause of your sharp deed there goeth,
Nor do I see ye chac'd by other creature.
For love of God, and as ye are of nature
Gentle and free, say what may help ye best ;
For never saw I yet, from east to west,
Creature that fared with its own self so ill :
Truly, ye slay me with your woeful will.
Come down, for God's sake, from the tree ; do, bird ;
And on the faith of a king's daughter's word,
I will amend your sorrow, if I may,
With all my might, and that ere close of day,
So help me the great God that made us all.
As for your wounds, here's lyssop on the wall,
And balm, and myrrh, shall swiftly salve that trouble.'

But at these words the falcon 'gan redouble
Her piteous shrieks, till with a heavy groan
She fell to earth, and lay there as a stone.
As lieth a still stone, so lieth she.
Canace, in her lap full tenderly,
Taketh her up, and from her swoon she waketh,
And when deliver'd from her swoon she breaketh
Her silence into words, and thus hath spoken :—

“ That gentle heart hath pity on heart broken

May well be thought, since any small distress
Winneth such heart to show its gentleness.
I know thou pitiest me, fair Canace,
Of very womanly benignity
Which Nature in your loving heart hath set.
And yet, out of no hope to break my net,
But to obey a heart so kind and free,
And to warn others by unhappy me,
As the great lion by the whelp was taught,
Right for such cause, and in no other thought,
While I yet breathe, and can speak leisurely,
This heart, now breaking, will I show to thee."

While thus the bird was speaking, the king's
daughter
Wept, as if she were turning into water,
Till that the falcon bade her to be still,
And with a sigh obeyed her gentle will.

"Well was I born," quoth she; "alas the day!
And foster'd in a rock of marble grey
So tenderly, that nothing ail'd me long:
I knew not what misfortune was, nor wrong,
Till I could flee, under the heav'ns, full high.

“ There dwelt a tiercelet in the place, hard by,
Who seem'd a well of very crystal truth,
All were he deep in every fault of youth.
He wrapp'd it all so close in humble cheer,
And had a way so purely sweet and clear,
And was so pleasant, and so busy kind,
No traitor could have guess'd his traitorous mind ;—
Full deep in grain he dyed his pleasing powers ;—
Yea, as the serpent hideth under flowers
Till such time as the bite proclaimeth it,
Right so this god of love's own hypocrite
Put forth all sweets that make the shows of love :—
And as on tombstones all is fair above,
But under is the corpse, such as ye wot,
Such was this hypocrite, so fair, yet not ;
And in this wise he fashion'd his intent,
That, save the fiend, none dream'd of what he meant,
And serv'd, and wept, and plain'd, and spoke of death,
Till that my heart, too soft beneath such breath,
Gave him its love, in very thanks for his,
Not knowing how enough to pay such bliss.
And when he found his triumph gone so far,
And that my star had bow'd beneath his star,
He cared no more, although no more he won,
But left me, with a foolish heart undone,

And set his wits to gain as much elsewhere,
This being all his love, and all his care.

“ Lord ! with what cunning he would feign delight,
With what sweet reverence and subjected might !
How rapt, yet not beyond respect, for joy !
That never Jason, nor the star of Troy,
Jason !—no certes, nor since Lamech’s age
That first lov’d two, no man on earth could wage
Such magic war, the twenty thousandth part,
With the poor outworks of a loving heart.
His happy manner was a heaven to see
To any *woman* ; and so charm’d it me,
And I so loved him, and so watch’d his eyes,
For any look that might therein arise,
That did he suffer, the least bit on earth,
Fell there a speck of shadow on his mirth,
A pang so keen into my breast would shoot,
Methought I felt death twisting mine heart’s root.

“ He went alas ! and one thing dare say I,
I know what I but thought I knew, thereby ;
I know what is the pain of death indeed.
You might have sworn you saw his own heart bleed
When that he went, his look was so like mine,

So sorrowful; but it was all design.
He said his honour will'd that he must go,
And I so thought, since oft it falleth so.
I made a virtue of necessity,
And held my hand out, since 'twas so to be,
And took his own, and hid from him my grief,
Well as I could, to give his heart relief,
And said,—‘ Lo ! I am yours, and shall be, ever.’
I am. But him I shall see more, no, never.

“ What answer'd he, it needeth not rehearse :
Who can say better things ? who can do worse ?
I trow he had the ancient text in mind,
Which saith, that all things, pairing with their kind,
Gladden their hearts. Thus argue men, I guess ;
And what men pair with, is newfangleness ;
They act, as birds do, which they feed in cages :
For though they, day and night, tend them like pages,
And strew the bird's room fair and soft as silk,
And give him sugar, honey, bread, and milk,
Yet right anon, let but his door be up,
And with his feet he spurneth down his cup *,

* The beautiful and true picture of the bird “*spurning* down his cup”

(Yet right anon, as that his dore is up,
He with his feet wol spurnen down his cup)

And to the wood will be, and feed on worms.—
In that new college keepeth he his terms,
And learneth love of his own proper kind ;
No gentleness of home his heart may bind.

“ So fared it with this tiercelet, woe's the day !
Though he were gently born, and fresh, and gay,
And goodly to behold, and humble and free,
Yet on a time he saw a new bird flee,
And suddenly he lov'd this new bird so,
That from his falcon must his fancy go,
And he be hers, and look no more on me ;
Alas ! alas ! and there's no remedy,
Nor death itself, methinks, will let me die.”

And with that word this falcon 'gan to cry,
And swooneth oft within the lady's lap.
Great was the sorrow made for her mishap
By Canace and by her maidens all :
They knew not how their help might best befall ;

furnishes a charming variation of a simile which Chaucer is fond of, and which the reader has already met with in the Manciple's Tale of *Phæbus and the Crow*. All the strength and springing quickness of a bird's legs, and all the tendencies of his nature, are in the word *spurning*, thus applied ; and the immediate object of the action is implied by the word *down*. We see that the next moment, he will be triumphantly up in the air. Thus write great poets.

Yet Canace home beareth in her lap
The wounded thing, and hasteth to enwrap
The part in balsams, which the beak had hurt.
Then dug she in the ground for plant and wort
Of precious kinds ; and day and night she drew
Sanatives thence ; and by her bed a mew
All soft she set, with azure velvet lined,
To show the truth that is in womankind ;
But all without she had it painted green,
On which all false and mankind fowls were seen ;
And pies and daws coming on every side
With open mouths, to spite them and to chide.

Thus leave I Canace to keep her bird :—
Of her ring now I speak no other word,
Nor shall, till in good time my theme explain
How that this falcon gat her love again,
Repentant, as the Tartar stories show,
By mediation of Prince Cambalo,
Son of the king, as at the first was told *.

* Though male and female animals in general were accustomed to speak of one another as men and women in the pictures of former days, yet it is perhaps to be gathered, from the length to which this licence is carried in the one before us,—especially in the remarkable and sorrowful use of the simile about the *bird*,—that the falcon was a human being, in a temporary state of metamorphosis ;—a circumstance very common in tales of the East.

Meantime through fields of battle must I hold
My purpos'd way, and such adventures tell,
As never in the world the like befell.

First will I tell of this great Cambuscán,
That in his time full many a city wan ;
And after will I speak of Algarsife,
How that he wan Theodora to his wife,
For whom full oft in peril great he was,
Had help not reach'd him in the horse of brass ;
And after will I speak of Cambalo,
That fought in tourney with the brethren two,
Ere that the victor might his sister win ;
And where I left, there will I fresh begin.

* * * * *

[Here stopped the divine old poet, to the regret of all after
ages.]

THE FRANKLIN'S TALE;

MODERNIZED

By R. H. HORNE.

NOTE.

In the modernized transcription of this noble story, so perfect in its moral purpose and chivalrous self-devotion to a feeling of truth and honour, (though it would have been more satisfactory, in an intellectual sense, had the distinction been made between a sincere pledge of faith, and a "merry bond,") the liberty has been taken of omitting a long list of historical allusions, of no very desirable character, because they interrupt the progress of the main interest when at a passionate height. In all else, the best endeavours have been made to restore the old picture with as few touches, and with as little varnish as possible.

THE

FRANKLIN'S PROLOGUE.

'SQUIRE, in good faith, thou hast thyself well quit,
And fair and well I praise thy gentle wit,'
The Franklin said ; ' considering thy youth,
So feelingly thou speak'st, Sir, in good sooth,
If I may say so, there is no one here
That shall with thee in eloquence compare
If that thou live ; God give to thee good chance,
And to thy virtue send continuance.
Thy speaking pleaseth me in great degree.
I have a son, and by the sacred Three,
Rather than twenty pounds' worth of fair land,
I would, though now 'twere fallen in my hand,
He were a man of such discretion high
As I find thee : fie on possessions, fie !
Unless a man be virtuous withal.

I have my son reprov'd, and often shall :
To virtuous counsel will he not attend,
But loves to play at dice, and to expend,
And to lose all he hath—a gambling rage ;
And he would rather talk with groom or page
Than converse hold with any gentle wight
Of whom he gentillesse might learn aright.'

‘ Straw for your gentillesse !’ exclaimed our Host :
What, Franklin ! pardie, Sir, full well thou know'st
That each of you, as we have made accord,
Must tell a tale or two, or break his word.'
‘ Sir,’ quoth the Franklin, ‘ you say well and plain :
I pray you have me not in such disdain,
Though I to this man speak a word or two.'
‘ Tell,’ quoth the Host, ‘ thy tale : why this to-do ?’
‘ Gladly, Sir Host,’ quoth he, ‘ I will obey
Your pleasant will : now hearken what I say ;—
I shall your purpose hinder in no wise,
So far as my poor knowledge may suffice.
I pray to God that it may please you well,
Then will be good enough the tale I tell.'

‘ These Britons old, and noble in their days,
Of strange adventures made them divers lays,

Rhymed in their earliest native British tongue ;
Which lays unto their instruments they sung,
Or else they read them for their cordial glee :
And one of them have I in memory.
I'll tell it with good will, as best I can.'

' But, Sirs, because I am a rough-spun man,
Ere my beginning I would you beseech
Have me excused for my unstudied speech.
Rhetoric I never learnt, and none will feign :
All that I speak it must be bare and plain.
Dreams on Parnassus Mount I ne'er did know,
Nor studied Marcus Tullius Cicero.
Figures and colours know I none, indeed,
But such as grow for ever in the mead ;
Or else such hues as men dye with, or paint ;—
Colours of rhetoric are to me all quaint :
My spirit feeleth nought of such dry cheer ;
But if ye list my story ye shall hear.'

THE
FRANKLIN'S TALE.

IN Armorique, once known as Basse Bretagne,
There was a knight who sought with loving pain
A lady, and to serve her in best guise ;
And many a labour, many a great emprise,
He for this lady wrought e'er she was won.
One of the fairest was she 'neath the sun,
And thereto in her lineage so high
That scarcely durst this lover tremblingly
Tell her his woe, his passion, and distress.
But, at the last, she, for his worthiness,
And chiefly for his meek obedience sweet,
Caught pity from his penance at her feet,
Till secretly she fell into accord,
To take him for her husband and her lord,—

(Such lordship as men have over their wives).
And in more bliss to lead their future lives,
Of his free will his knightly word he pass'd,
Never, by night or day, while life should last,
To claim or take upon him mastery
Over her will, nor vex with jealousy ;
But her obey, and follow her will in all,
As any lover at his lady's call :
Save that the name or shadow of sovereignty,
Still would he keep for shame of his degree.

She thankéd him, and with great humbleness
She answer'd, ' Sir, since of your gentleness
Ye proffer me to have so large a reign,
I pray to God that ne'er between us twain,
Far less through guilt of mine, be war or strife.
Sir, I will be your humble and true wife.
Take here my heart, till that it leave my breast.'
Thus are they both in quiet and at rest.

For one thing, Sirs, full safely dare I say,—
That loving friends each other must obey,
If they would long remain in company.
Love will not be constrain'd by mastery.
When mastery cometh, the God of Love anon

Beateth his wings—and, farewell ! he is gone *.
 Love is a thing as any spirit free :
 Women, by nature, wish for liberty,
 And not to be constrain'd as in a thrall ;
 And so do men, to speak truth,—one and all.
 Note well the wight most patient in his love :
 He standeth, in advantage, all above.
 That patience is a virtue high, is plain,
 Because it conquers, as the clerks explain,
 Things that rude vigour never could attain.
 Chide not for every trifle, nor complain ;
 Learn to endure, or, so betide my lot,
 Learn it ye shall, whether ye will or not.
 For in this world is no one, certain 'tis,

* Butler has made a very excellent paraphrase of this passage in his *Hudibras*, part iii. c. 1. lines 553 to 560. Pope has made use of Chaucer more literally.

"Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,
 Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies."

Eloise to Abelard.

Warburton, in a note on these lines, alludes to this "imitation" of Chaucer, and quotes the following as being the original:—

When maisterie comes, the *Lord of Love* anon
Flutters his wings, and *forthwith* is he gone.

The words in italics are Warburton's. Neither of these versions possess any of the vigour and sincerity of the Father of English Poetry. The light perfumed wings, admirably adapted to the idealities of the boudoir, with all their fluttering levity, have none of the moral justification of an honest passion.

But that he sometimes doth, or saith, amiss.
Anger, ill health, or influence malign
Of planets—changes in the blood—woe, wine,
Oft cause in word or deed that we transgress.
For every wrong we should not seek redress.
After a time there must be temperance
In every man that knows self-governance.
And therefore hath this worthy and wise knight
(To live in ease) yielded his wife all right ;
And she to him as wisely 'gan to swear
That never should there be default in her.

Here may men see an humble wise accord.
Thus taketh she her servant and her lord :
Servant in love, in marriage lord to be.
Lordship and servitude at once hath he ?
Servitude ?—nay, in lordship all above,
Since that he hath his lady and his love :
His lady doubtless, but his wife besides,
In all that love by its own law decides.
And when he prosperous was in this degree,
Home with his wife he went to his countr y :
Not far from Penmark was his pleasant seat,
And there he liveth in bliss and solace sweet.

Who could declare, save those that wedded be,
The joy, the ease, and the prosperity,
That is between an husband and his wife?
A year and more lasteth this blissful life,
Till that this knight—by name Arviragus,
Of Cairrud, and whose tale I tell you thus—
Resolved to go and dwell a year or twain
In England, that was also call'd Britain;
Worship and honour to achieve in arms,
(For him such labour had the noblest charms)
And there he staid two years: the book saith thus.

Now will I leave this knight Arviragus,
And speak awhile of Dorigen his wife,
Who loveth her husband as her heart's best life.
Grief at his absence sighs and weeping prove,
As with these noble wives bereaved of love.
She mourneth, waketh, wailleth, fasteth, plaineth;
The yearning for his presence so constraineth,
That all this widened world she set at nought.
Her dearest friends who knew her heavy thought,
Comfort her pain in all that ever they may:
They preach to her; they tell her night and day
That without cause her life she wastes, alas!

And every comfort possible in this case,
With busy care they give, and round her press,
In hopes to make her leave this heaviness.

Progressively, as know ye every one,
Men may engrave so long upon a stone
That there some figure shall imprinted be ;
So long her friends have wrought on her, that she,
By hope and reason hath resumed her station,
Receiving impress of their consolation,
Which somewhat doth her sorrow great assuage :
She could not live in its unceasing rage.
Arviragus also, with his utmost care,
Hath sent her letters home of his welfare,
And that he shortly should come back again ;
Or else with sorrow had her heart been slain.

Her friends perceived her sorrow 'gan to slake,
And prayed her on their knees, for Jesu's sake,
To come and journey in their company,
And thereby banish her dark phantasy :
And finally she granted that request,
For well she saw that it was for the best.

Now stood their castle fast by the wild sea,

And often with her friends forth walkéd she,
Pastime to take along the bank on high,
Where she could many a ship and barge espie,
Sailing their course, where'er they list to go.
But this became a part, then, of her woe,
For to herself full oft, 'Alas!' said she,
'Is there not one, o' the many ships I see,
Will bring me home my lord?—then were my heart
Heal'd and reliev'd of pain and bitter smart.'

At other times there would she sit and think ;
And cast her sad eyes downward from the brink,
And when she saw the grisly rock-rifts black,
For very terror would her heart so shake
That she could not sustain herself, I ween.
Then would she sit adown upon the green,
And piteously the sea beneath behold,
And say right thus, with sighs care-full and cold :

'Eternal God ! that through thy Providence
Guidest this world by certain governance,—
In vain, as men say, dost thou nothing make :
But oh, Dread Lord, these grisly fiend-rocks black,
That rather seem of work a foul confusion,
Than any fair creation or conclusion

Of such a perfect God, all-wise and stable ;—
Why hast thou wrought this work unreasonable ?
For by this work,—north, south, nor east, nor west,
Is fed or foster'd man, or bird, or beast :
It doth no good, methinks, but all annoyeth.
See ye not, Lord, mankind how it destroyeth ?
An hundred thousand bodies of mankind
Have rocks slain—though we bear it not in mind ;
Yet man is of thy work so fair a part,
Thou madest him in thine image, as thou art.
Thus doth it seem ye had great charity
Towards mankind ; but how then may it be
That ye a means have taken which destroyeth ;
Which means effects no good, but ever annoyeth ?

‘ I wot well, clerks will say e'en as they list,
By arguments, that all is for the best,
Though I can of the causes nought yknow :
But thou, Great God, that made the wind to blow,
Keep safe my lord !—such my conclusion is :
To clerks leave I all vain disputes like this.
But would to heaven that all these fiend-rocks black
Were sunk down into hell, for his dear sake !
These rocks they tear my heart with constant fear.'—
Thus would she speak with many a piteous tear.

Her friends now saw it was no pleasantness
To ramble by the sea, but wretchedness ;
And sought amusement elsewhere. Through fair dells
They lead her by the rivers, lakes, and wells,
And other places full of loveliness :
They dance, and play at games of drafts and chess.

So on a day, right in the morning tide,
Unto a garden that was close beside,
In which they pleasantly had ranged about
Their tents and seats, and all the feast set out ;
There went they forth to sport them all the day.
This the sixth morning was of fragrant May ;
Which May all painted had with his soft showers
This garden full of leaves and eke of flowers,
And curiously the hand of man with art
Had deck'd this garden truly in each part,
That never was there garden of such price,
Except it were the very Paradise.
The odour of flowers and freshness of the sight
Would any heart have filled and made it light,
That e'er was born—sickness too great, unless,
Or too great sorrow, held it in distress—
So full it was of beauty and pleasance.

And after dinner went they forth to dance,
And sing alsó, save Dorigen alone,
Who her complaint made always, and her moan,
For him she saw not through the dances go,
Who was her husband and her lover too.
But ne'ertheless she must a time abide,
And through good hopes let her pale sorrow glide.

Amid this dance, above all other men,
Dancéd a squire before this Dorigen,
That fresher was and brighter of array,
As to my mind, than is the month of May.
He singeth, danceth, passing any man,
That is or was since that the world began.
Therewith he was, should I to paint him strive,
One of the best conditioned men alive :
Young, strong, and virtuous, and rich, and wise,
And well beloved, and holden in great prize ;
And, briefly, if the truth I must recall,
While Dorigen unconscious was of all,
This lusty squire—votary of Beauty's Queen,
And named Aurelius—since he had her seen,
Of any creature her had loved the best,
Two years and more ; such was his fate's behest.

But of his grievance durst he never tell :
Unmeasurably drank he from his well.
He was despairing ; nothing would he say ;
Save in his songs he somewhat would betray
His grief, in general bitterness of thought :
He said he loved, and was belovéd nought.
Of such sad matter made he many lays ;
Songs, and complaints, roundels, and virelays :
How that he durst not of his sorrow tell,
But languisheth, as doth a fury in hell ;
And die he must, as Echo did, said he,
For sweet Narcissus—loving silently.

In other manner than ye hear me say,
To Dorigen he dare not aught betray,
Save that perhaps at dances, here and there,
When that young folk are free and debonaire,
It may well be he looked upon her face
In such a guise as man that asketh grace :
But nothing wist she of his fond intent.
But ne'ertheless it happ'd as thence they went—
Because he was her neighbour, dwelling near ;
A man of worship and of honour fair ;
And Dorigen had known him well of yore—

They fell in converse ; and aye more and more
Unto his purpose drew Aurelius :
And when he saw his time, he said right thus.

‘ Madam,’ quoth he, ‘ by Him who this world made,
So that I wist it might your gladness aid,
I would, that day when your Arviragus
Went over sea, that I, Aurelius,
Had gone, whence I should never come again.
For well I wot my service is in vain :—
My guerdon is but breaking of my heart.
Madam ! have ruth upon me ere we part ;
For with a word ye may me kill or save.
Here, at your feet, would God I had my grave !
Enough time now I have not more to say :
Have mercy, sweet, or else ye will me slay.’

She ’gan to look upon Aurelius now :
‘ Is this your will,’ quoth she, ‘ and say ye so ?
Never, ere this, I dreamt of what ye meant ;
But now I know, Aurelius, your intent,
By yonder Power that gave me soul and life,
Never will I be found an untrue wife
In word nor work, as far as I have wit :
I will be his to whom that I am knit.

Take this for final answer now from me.'—
But smiling, after that, continued she :

‘ Aurelius,’ said she, ‘ by high God above,
Yet will I grant that you shall have your love
(Thus hearing you so piteously complain ;)
Lo ! on the day that lengthways through Bretaine
Ye all the rocks remove, stone after stone,
That boat or ship strike not again thereon :
I say, when ye have made the coast so clean
Of rocks, that not a single stone is seen,
Then will I love you best of any man !
Take here my troth for all that ever I can.
Full well I wot that it shall never betide :
Let all such folly out of your heart glide.
Why should a man’s life waste in fancies weak,
That he another’s wife should love and seek,
Who giveth her husband all things evermore ?’

Now, and full oft, Aurelius sigheth sore.
‘ Is there no other grace in you ?’ quoth he :
‘ No, by that Lord,’ she said, ‘ that makéd me.’
Woe was Aurelius when these words she spoke,
And with a sorrowful heart he silence broke :
‘ Madam, this is impossible !’ said he :

‘A sudden, horrid death, mine end must be.’
And with that word he turned him pale away.

Then came her other friends, in pleasant way,
And in the alleys roam’d they up and down,
Nor of this matter aught to them was known,
But suddenly their revels they renew,
Till that the bright faced sun had lost his hue;
Because the horizon ’reft him of his light
(This is to say, in other words, ’twas night)
And home all wend in ease, and full of glee,
Save wretched Aurelius—none was sad but he.
He to his house is gone with sorrowful heart.
He saith he cannot ’scape of death the dart:
It seemed to him he felt his heart a-cold.
Up to the heavens his hands he ’gan to hold
And on his bare knees forthwith sank he down,
And in his raving said his orison.
For very woe out of his wits he strayed:
He knew not what he spake, but thus he said:
With piteous heart his plaint hath he begun
Unto the gods; and first unto the sun.

He said, ‘Apollo! God, and ruling power
Of every plant, and herb, and tree, and flower;

That giv'st, according to thy declination,
To each his time, his season, and his station,
E'en as thy bright house changeth low and high ;
Lord Phœbus, cast thine ever-pitying eye
On wretched Aurelius—now a man forlorn !
Behold, my lady hath my death-blow sworn,
Though guiltless I :—but thou, Benignity,
Some pity for my deadly heart give me !
For well I wot, Lord Phœbus, if ye list,
Ye may me help—except my lady—best.
Now vouchsafe, God, that I may you apprise
How that I may be helped, and in what wise.

‘ Your blissful sister Luna, silvery sheen,
That of the sea chief goddess is and queen—
Though Neptune have his god-ship in the sea,
Yet clouded empress over him is she—
Ye well know, Lord, that even as her desire
Is to be quicken'd—lighted by your fire,
For which she followeth like an humble creature ;
Right so, the sea desireth by its nature
To follow her, as she is goddess high
Both of the sea and rivers far and nigh.
Wherefore, Lord Phœbus, pity on me take !
Work thou this miracle, or mine heart break ;—

That when in opposition next shall be
Her orb, which in the Lion we shall see,
Beseech her then so great a flood to bring,
That fathoms five, at least, it overspring
The highest rock in Armorique Bretagne !
And let this swollen flood endure years twain.
Then, certes, to my lady may I say
Hold your behest—the rocks are all away !
Lord Phœbus, do this miracle for me ;—
Pray her to go no faster course than ye.
I say this—pray your sister that she go
No faster course than ye, during years two.
Then shall her visage be at full alwáy,
And thus the spring-flood last both night and day.
But if that my complaint she will not hear,
And grant to me my sovran lady dear,
Then pray her every rock to sink adown
Into the region dark, which is her own,
Under the ground, where Pluto dwells in night ;
Or never shall I win my lady bright.

‘ Thy temple in Delphos will I barefoot seek.
Lord Phœbus, see the tears upon my cheek ;
And some compassion have upon my moan !’
And with that word in sorrow he fell adown.

Outstretch'd, and cold, in trance he lay full long.
His brother, knowing of his passion strong,
Upraised him, and to bed he hath him brought.
Despairing in this torment and this thought,
Leave I this woful creature thus to lie :
I know not whether he will live or die.

Arviragus with health and honour's dower,
As one that was of chivalry the flower,
At home arrives with other worthy men.
Oh, blissful art thou now, thou Dorigen !
Thou hast thy noble husband in thine arms ;
The fresh knight, safe from wars, and rocks, and storms,
Who loveth thee, e'en as his own heart's life.
Nothing suspicious was he of his wife,
That any wight had access to her sought,
And spoke of love : he had of that no thought ;
Nor listened he to any such affair.
He danceth, jousteth, maketh merry cheer.
And thus in joy and bliss I let them dwell,
And of the sick Aurelius will I tell.

In languor and in torment furious,
Two years and more lay worn Aurelius,
Ere that one foot of earth his step hath gone ;

And comfort all this season had he none,
Save from his brother, who was a wise clerk,
And knew of all this woe and all this work.
For to no other creature, certain 'tis,
He durst confide a single word of this.
More close in heart he hid the fond idea,
Than Pamphilus did, when loving Galatea.
His breast was whole without, and nought was seen,
But in his heart aye was the arrow keen ;
And well ye know a wound with skin healed o'er,
In surgery is perilous evermore,
Unless the arrow touched or drawn may be.

His brother weepeth and wailleth privately,
Till he bethought him at the last, by chance,
That while he was at Orleans, in France,—
(Among young clerks that have a hankering
To study arts, and each forbidden thing,
Prying in every nook at every turn,
Particular sciences to seek and learn,)—
If memory truly served, upon a day
A curious book, which in the study lay,
Of natural magic, on the desk he saw,
Left by his friend ; a bachelor of law
At that time—all unwitting on his part,
For he was there to learn a different art.

This book of mansions spake, and operations
Touching the eight and twenty mystic stations
That to the moon belong—such folly high
As in our own days is not worth a fly :
For holy church's faith, as we believe,
Never illusion suffereth us to grieve.
When he bethought him of this book in France,
Anon his heart for joy began to dance,
And to himself he said right secretly—
' My brother soon recovered now shall be ;
For I am sure that sciences there are
By which men divers visions make appear ;
Such tricks as subtle jugglers ever play.
Full oft, at feasting times, have I heard say
That jugglers, standing in a knight's hall large,
Have made come in a river and a barge,
And through the hall go rowing up and down :
Sometimes a lion grim himself hath shewn ;
And sometimes flowers sprung up as in a mead ;
Sometimes a vine, with ripe grapes white and red ;
Sometimes a castle, all of lime and stone ;—
And when they wished—'twas voided, and all gone !
Thus seemeth it, at least, to all men's sight.

' Now then conclude I thus,—if that I might

Some old magician still at Orleans find,
Who hath the moon's quaint mansions in his mind,
Or other magic sleights with stars above,
Through him my brother may obtain his love;
For by illusion can these old clerks make
Unto man's sight that all the huge rocks black
Of Bretagne, were evanished every one,
While ships come close to land, and then float on :
And thus continue for a day or two.
Then were my brother cured of all his woe.
For then must Dorigen her promise hold,
Or else, at least, her shameful jest be told.'

Why should I make a longer tale of this?
Unto his brother's bed he came, I wis,
And gave him such good reason to begone
For Orleans, that he started up anon,
And on his way forth-forward doth he fare,
In hopes to be reliev'd of all his care.

When that the city they can well nigh see,
Not distant more than furlongs two or three,
A young clerk roaming by himself they meet,
Who cautiously in Latin doth them greet;
And after that he said a wondrous thing :—

'I know,' quoth he, 'the object that doth bring
You here !' and scarce a foot they further went
Before he told them what was their intent.

Aurelius' brother asked him anxiously
Of jugglers, known to him in days gone by ;
And he replied, that dead these old clerks were,
For which he wept full often many a tear.

Down from his horse Aurelius 'lights anon,
And with this young magician is he gone
Home to his house. He made them well at ease :
There lack'd no viands to recruit and please.
A house so well conducted as this one,
Aurelius in his life saw never, none.

He show'd them, ere they went to supper here,
Forests, and green parks full of the wild deer :
There saw Aurelius harts with antlers high ;
The greatest that were ever seen with eye.
He saw, of them, an hundred slain by hounds,
And some from arrows bled with bitter wounds.
He saw, when swept away the herds of deer,
The falconers rowing on a river clear,
Who with their falcons have the heron slain.

Then saw he gay knights tilting in a plain ;
And after this, his fond heart to entrance,
He show'd to him his lady in a dance,
In which himself danced also,—as he thought ;—
And when the Master, who this magic wrought,
Saw fit, he clapp'd his hands at this false clothing,—
And farewell all the revel ! There is nothing !
And yet removed they never out o' the house
While all these sights they saw, so marvellous,
But in his study, where his books all be,
There sat they still—and no wight but these three !

To him this Master call'd his servant now,
And said right thus, ' To supper may we go ?
Almost an hour it is, I undertake,
Since that I bade you should our supper make,
When these my worthy friends both went with me
Into my study, where my books all be.'
' Sir,' quoth the servant, ' when it liketh you :
It is all ready, if ye choose, right now.'
' Come, then, we'll sup,' said he, ' for, with the best,
These amorous folk must sometimes take their rest.'

After their supper, treaty make these three
What good sum should this Master's guerdon be,

If he removed the black rocks of Bretaigne,
And eke from Gironde to the mouth of Seine.

He made it a great favour—' God him save,
Less than a thousand pound he would not have ;
Nor, e'en for that sum, cared he to be gone !'

Aurelius with a blissful heart, anon
Answer'd right thus—' Fie on a thousand pound !
This world below, which scholars say is round,
All would I give, if I were lord of it.
This bargain is concluded—we are knit :
Ye shall be paid all truly, by my troth.
But, look ye, for no negligence or sloth
Delay us longer than to-morrow here.'
' Nay,' quoth the clerk, ' good faith to you I swear.'

To bed is gone Aurelius, as he list,
And well nigh all that night he had his rest :
Faint with his labours, fed with hope of bliss,
His woeful heart found some reprieve, I wis.

Upon the morrow, when that it was day,
To Bretaigne forthright sped they on their way ;—
Aurelius—the magician at his side ;—

And are alighted where they will abide.
Now this was, as my tables me remember,
The cold and frosty season of December.

Phœbus wax'd old ; like tarnish'd brass in hue ;
That, his hot declination passing through,
Shone like to burnéd gold, with broad rays bright ;
But now in Capricorn he down doth 'light,
Wherein he shone full pale—I dare well say.
The bitter frosts, with sleet and rain, affray
The garden's green, till all hath disappeared.
Janus sits by the fire with double beard,
And drinketh from his buffalo-horn the wine !
Before him stands brawn of the tuskéd swine,
And “ *Christmas !* ” crieth every lusty man.

Aurelius now, in all that ever he can,
Giveth his Master cheer and reverence,
And prayeth him to work with diligence,
And bring him out of anguish by his art,
Or with a sword to thrust him through the heart.

The subtle clerk such ruth hath on this man,
That night and day he speedeth all he can,
Watching the time that favour'd his conclusion ;

That is to say, the time for his illusion,
 So to make things appear by jugglery,
 (I know no terms of their astrology,)
 That Dorigen and every wight should say
 The solid rocks of Bretaigne were away,
 Or else they all were sunken under ground !
 So, at the last, he hath his fit time found
 To make the dark sleights and the wretchedness
 Of such a soul-deluding cursedness.

His Tolitanian Tables forth he brought *,
 Full well corrected, and they lacked nought ;—
 Neither his years, in compound sums, nor single,
 That in the heavenly computations mingle,

* This astrological incantation stands thus in the original :—

His tables Toletanes forth he brought
 Ful wel corrected, that ther lacked nought,
 Nother his collect, ne his expans yeres,
 Nother his notes, ne his other geres,
 As ben his centres, and his argumentes,
 And his proportionel convenientes
 For his equations in every thing.
 And by his eighte speres in his werking,
 He knew ful wel how fer Alnath was shove
 Fro the hed of thilke fix Aries above
 That in the ninthe spere considered is, &c.

While the poet was writing this, nearly five hundred years ago, there was evidently a tendency to denounce the *abuse* of astrology. For the benefit of the curious, and to display the alleged advances of Science over Imagination,

Accordant with their motions and their phases ;
Neither his roots, wherefrom with care he raises
His branching calculations ; nor the intents
Of all his centres and his arguments,
(Their arcs described, proportional to find,
Another arc drawn somewhere in his mind)
For his equations ; right in every thing.
And by his eight spheres, doth his working bring
The proof how far the house of Alnath lay
From the fix'd Aries' head i'the higher way ;
Which, hence, in the ninth sphere consider'd is.
Full subtly calculated he all this.
And when that his first mansion he obtain'd,
He, by proportion, knew all that remain'd ;
And knew the rising of the moon right well—

(to the destruction of the latter, as some affirm,) we have consulted a well-known living astrologer on the above passage, who has obliged us with the following.

“ In the time of Chaucer, the knowledge of the particular degrees, of each sign, occupying the cusp, or entrance, of the twelve horoscopol Houses, was extremely incorrect. The old tables have been abandoned by modern astrologers, (among whom there are several secret students in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge,) and are of course replaced by perfect tables. The extent of the error may be seen by the computations of Lilly, the celebrated astrologer of king Charles the First's time, (who received a grant of a hundred pounds a year from the Parliament,) and yet these Lilly tables are now published without correction, though corrected copies may be purchased cheaply. The errors ascribed to the science are in truth the errors of calculation. As for the mode of working adopted by the ‘ clerk’ in this poem, we know that the moon rules in Cancer—there she has her mansion and

In whose face—in what term—all could he tell ;
And likewise the moon's mansion knew, her station
Accordant with his varying operation :
And other observations he enhances
For such illusions, and against mischances,
As heathen folk would use in those old days.
And now no longer maketh he delays—
But through his magic, wrought in the night air,
It seem'd the rocks were gone—or never there !

her dignities—and Cancer represents the ocean in the world's horoscope. If the poet has a latent and secondary meaning, then Cancer, in the *Mysteries*, is also the populace, and Neptune is public opinion. So far we may follow the 'clerk,' but he subsequently shows himself to be a juggler, and not a worker by regular natural science. He meddles with fixed substances, instead of keeping to calculations and abstract ordinances. For nonentities (in the modern advances of science) have as much power as real things. What is the meridian but a nonentity ? Yet the meridian changes the signification of all planetary bodies. Of the Tolitian Tables, constructed by order of Alphonso, king of Naples, it does not appear that Chaucer knew much, nor are they valuable for correctness. But when the learned commentator on Chaucer, Mr. Tyrwhitt, undertakes to prove that the poet, in the opening of his great Prologue, was wrong in saying, 'the yonge sonne hath in the *Ram* his half cours yronne ;' and that he ought to have said the *Bull*,—the poet turns out to be the best astronomer. For the poet reckoned by the new style, and not the old. The new style was not adopted at that time in England, but Chaucer took it in advance of his time from foreign tables. It was called a 'new style' only when *adopted* in England—but it was not new to Chaucer. He means the first week of April."

Chaucer was evidently fond of astronomy, and wrote a treatise on the Astrolabe. A manuscript copy of this, together with a work on Geomancy, by another author, is now in the possession of the Duke of Northumberland ; and a manuscript copy of the latter is also possessed by Mr. Varley, by whom we have been obliged with the foregoing unique comments.

Aurelius, both in hope and in despair,
Unknowing how his chance of love may fare,
Awaiteth for the prodigy night and day :
And when he heard the rocks were all away—
For a time vanish'd—all his barriers gone—
Down at his Master's feet he fell anon,
And said, ' I woeful wretch, Aurelius,
Thank you, my Lord, and Venus fair, who thus
Have helpéd me out of my anguish cold.'

And to the temple he his way doth hold,
Wherein he knew his lady he should see.
And when he saw his time, he tremblingly
With heart in dread, and with full humble cheer,
Saluted hath his sovran lady dear.

' My truth-full lady,' said this woeful man,
' Whom I most dread, and love, as best I can,
And last of all this world would I displease ;
Were't not that I for you upon my knees
Must die here at your foot, and that anon,
Nought would I tell how I am woe-begone.
But, certes, either must I die or 'plaine :
Ye slay me, guiltless, for my very pain.

But for my death, though that ye have no ruth,
Advise you well, ere that you break your troth :
Pause, and repent unto the God above,
Ere you destroy my life because I love.
For, madam, call to mind what ye did plight—
Not that I challenge anything of right,
From you, my sovran lady, but of grace ;
Howbeit, in a garden near yon place,
Ye wot right well all that ye promised me ;
And in my hand your truth pledged willingly,
To love me best—God wot, but ye said so—
Although that I unworthy am thereto.
Madam, I speak it for your honour, more
Than my heart's life to save, now wounded sore :
All have I done that ye commanded me ;
And, if ye vouchsafe, ye may go and see.
Do as ye list—but bear your word in mind,
For quick or dead, you shall me surely find ;
With you it lieth to give me life, or slay—
But well I wot the rocks are all away !

He taketh his leave—and she astounded stood !
In all her face was not one drop of blood !
She thought not to be caught in such a trap.

‘ Alas,’ cried she, ‘ that ever this should hap !
For dreamt I never by possibility
That such a prodigy could ever be.
It is against the order’d course of nature.’
And home she slowly went, a sorrowful creature.
For very fear all trembling doth she go.

She weepeth, waileth constantly, days two,
And swooneth often, pity ’twas to see ;
But what the occasion, to no wight told she,
For, from the town Arviragus was gone.
But to herself she spake thus, all forlorn,
With a pale face, and with full sorry cheer
In her complaint, as ye shall pitying hear.

‘ Alas,’ cried she, ‘ Fortune, on thee I ’plaine,
Who, unaware, hast wrapped me in thy chain,
From which to ’scape no succour can I see,
Save but to die, or else dishonour’d be.
One of these two behoveth me to choose ;
But ne’ertheless far rather would I lose
My life, than give my nature up to shame,
Or know myself all false, or blot my name :
So shall my death absolve me from my vow.
Hath there not many a noble wife, ere now

And many a maiden, slain herself, alas !
Rather than let dishonour o'er her pass.
Yes, truly : lo ! their stories witness bear.
Why then of death should I have any fear ?'

Thus Dorigen complained unceasingly,
Purposing evermore that she would die,
But lingering on, till the third night was come :
Arviragus, the worthy knight, came home,
And questioned her why thus she wept so sore ?
And she again fell weeping ever the more.

' Alas !' said she, ' that ever I was born !
Thus have I said,' (quoth she,) ' thus have I sworn :'
And told him all, as ye have heard before ;
There needeth not I should rehearse it more.

The husband, with glad cheer in friendly wise,
Answer'd and said, as I shall you apprise.
' Is there aught else, then, Dorigen, but this ?'
' Nay, nay,' cried she, ' so heaven me help, I wis
'Tis far too much, though it were God his will.'

' Sweet wife,' said he, ' let sleep what now is still :
All may be well, perhaps, to-day,' he saith.

‘ But ye shall hold your truth, by my good faith ;
For God so wisely mercy have on me,
I had far rather stabbed and ended be,
For very love that I unto you have,
Than you your truth should fail to keep and save.
Truth is the highest thing that man may keep.’
And with that word he suddenly ’gan weep ;
And said, ‘ I you forbid, on pain of death,
Ever, while with you lasteth life or breath,
To tell of this mishap to any man.
My woe I will endure as best I can ;
And show no face of doubt or heaviness,
That folk of you may deem amiss, or guess.’
And now he call’d a squire, and eke a maid :
‘ Go forth anon, with Dorigen,’ he said.

They bring her presently unto the place,
And take their leave ; and then their way retrace ;
But nothing knew they why she thither went :
She would to no wight tell of her intent.

And now Aurelius, ever, as I ween,
With amorous sorrow dreaming of Dorigene,
Happen’d by chance his lady soon to meet

Amid the town, and in the nearest street
That led unto the way her steps were bent,
And also tow'rds the garden, where she went.
Aurelius tow'rds the garden sped him now,
For well he knew whenever she might go
Out of her house, to any other place.
But thus they met by accident, or grace,
And he saluteth her with glad intent,
And asketh of her whitherward she went?

And she replied, as though she were half mad,
'Unto the garden, as my husband bade,
My truth to save and hold, alas! alas!'

Aurelius 'gan to ponder o'er this case;—
And in his heart he had compassion great
For her, her lamentation, and her state,
And for Arviragus, the noble knight,
Who bade her hold her promise as of right,
So loath was he his wife should break her truth.
And in his heart he caught of this great ruth;
Considering 'twas the best on every side
His passion rather he should quell or hide,
Than like a base churl cause such high distress

To generous honour and to gentillesse.
Wherefore, in few words, to her said he thus.

‘Madam, say to your lord, Arviragus,
That since I see the knightly nobleness
Of him, and seeing also your distress ;—
That he would rather have shame (and this were ruth)
Than ye to me should break your word and truth ;
I had far sooner suffer constant woe
Than injure aught of love between you two.

‘I do release you, madam ; in your hand
Place each security and every bond
That ye have giv’n to me, up to this day,
Since ye were born,—as fully as I may.
Take here my troth—I never will you grieve
For promis’d love ; and here I take my leave,
As of the truest and the worthiest wife
That ever yet I knew in all my life.
But every wife beware of promised love ;
Like Dorigen they may not always prove.
Thus can a squire perform a gentle deed,
As well as can a knight, though his heart bleed.’

She thanks Aurelius low on her knees bare,

And home unto her husband doth she fare,
And told him all, as ye have now heard said :
And trust me this, he was so well repay'd
That 'twere impossible for me to write.

What should I further of this case indite ?
Arviragus, and Dorigen his wife,
In sovran bliss henceforward lead their life.
Never came grief or anger them between :
He cherish'd her as though she were a queen ;
And she was true to him as heretofore.
Now of these two ye get from me no more.

Aurelius, thinking of his substance gone,
Curseth the time that ever he was born.
' Alas ! ' cried he, ' I promised, in my strait,
Of gold all pure a thousand pound of weight,
To the philosopher ! How shall I do ?
Nothing I see but ruin in the view.
Mine heritage forthwith I needs must sell,
And be a beggar. Here I will not dwell,
Disgracing all my kindred in the place,
Unless of him I get some better grace.
But ne'ertheless I will of him essay
At certain days, and year by year, to pay,

And thank him much for his great courtesy.
My promise will I keep—I will not lie.'

With heart full sore, his chest-bags in his hold,
To this philosopher he brought his gold,
The value of five hundred pounds, I guess ;
And him beseecheth of his courteousness,
To grant, for what remained, a longer term ;
And saying, ' Master, I dare well affirm
I failed never of my truth, as yet ;
And certainly I will acquit my debt
To you, however poorly I may fare
To go a-begging in my kirtle bare.
But would ye vouchsafe, on security,
To grant me respite for two years or three,
Then were I well ; for else I needs must sell
Mine heritage : there is no more to tell.'

Then the philosopher answer'd soberly,
And said thus, when this last request heard he,—
' Have I not kept my covenant to thee ?'

' Yes, certes ; well and truly,' answer'd he.
' Hast thou not won thy love ?' the other crieth.

‘No—no,’ Aurelius said ; and sore he sigheth.
‘What was the cause ?—now tell me if you can.’

His tale Aurelius woefully began,
And told him all, as ye have heard before :
It needeth not rehearsal any more.
He said, ‘Arviragus, from nobleness,
Would rather die of sorrow and distress
Than, false to truth, his noble wife behold.’
The sorrow of Dorigen he also told ;
How loath she was to be a wicked wife,
Wishing, instead, to lose that day her life ;
And that her word she gave through innocence :
She never thought of magic, but fair sense.
‘This gave me such great pity her to see,
That freely as her husband sent to me,
As freely sent I her to him again.
This is the sum of all—more words are vain.’

Then answer’d the philosopher :—‘Good brother,
Each of ye acted nobly by the other :
Thou art a squire ; he is a worthy knight ;
And God forbid, in all his blissful might,
But that a clerk a gentle deed should do,
As well—ne’er doubt it—as this knight or you.

‘ Sir, I release thee of thy thousand pound,
As if but now thoud’st crept out of the ground,
And never till this moment had’st known me.
For, Sir, I will not take a penny of thee,
For all my craft, and all my labour given.
The good cheer of thy house hath made us even.
It is enough. Farewell ! give you good day.’
He took his horse, and forth he went his way.

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